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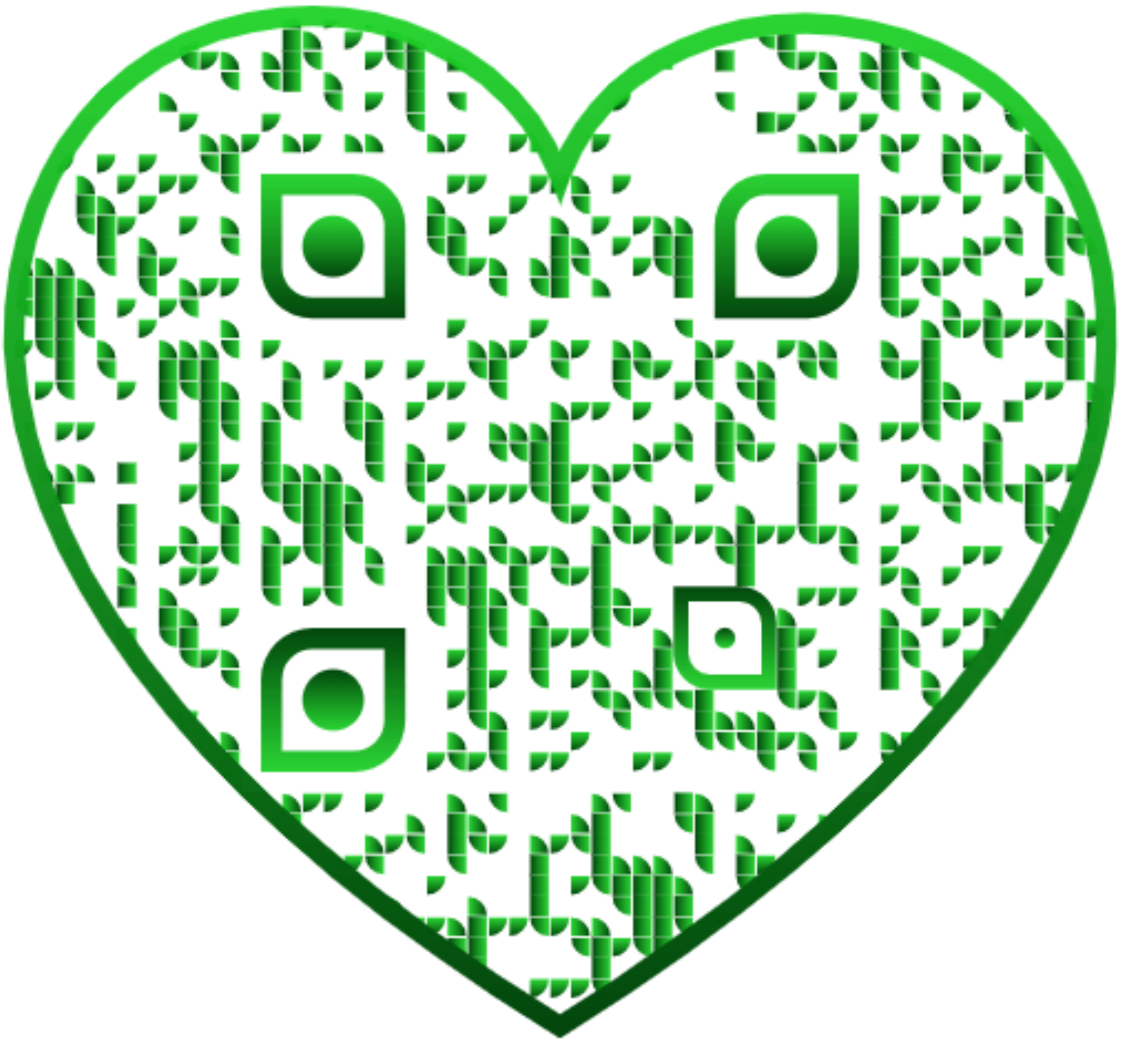
PROG 148



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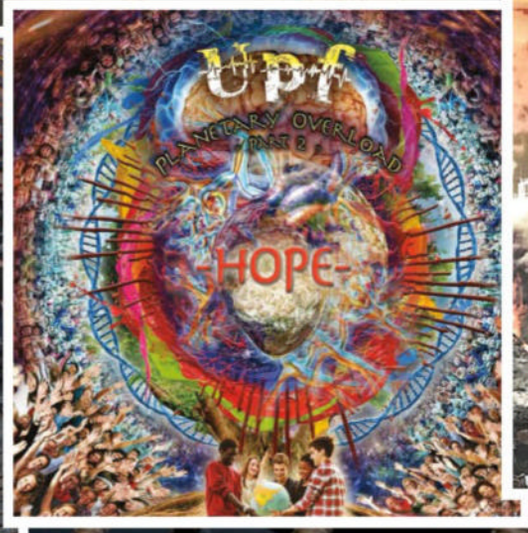

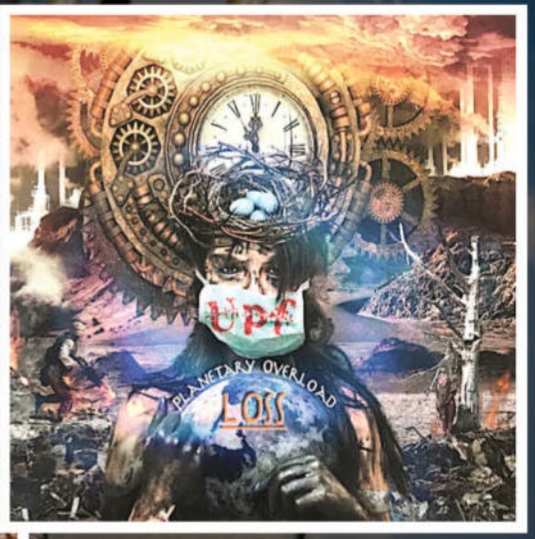

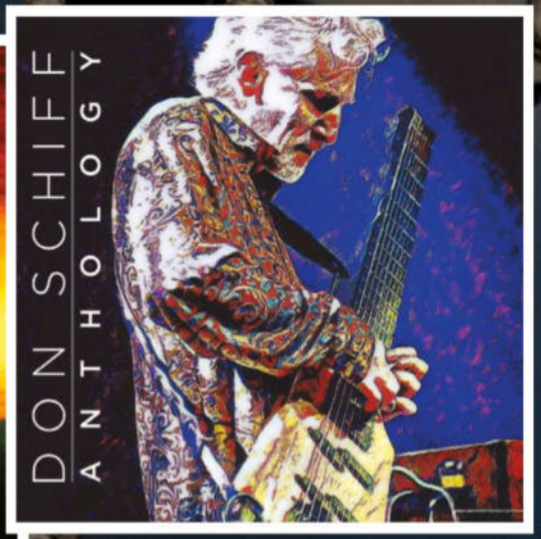

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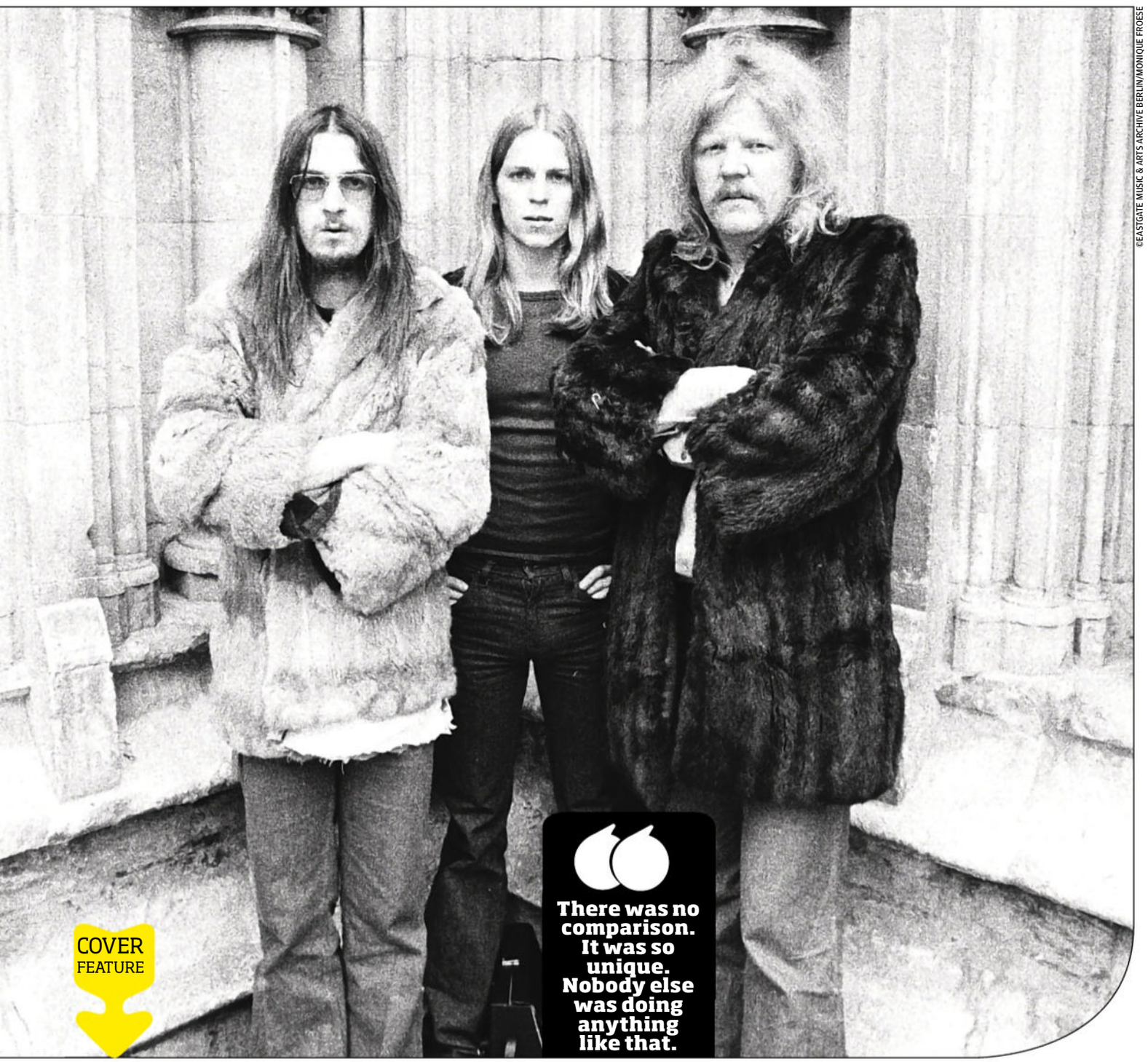

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COVER FEATURE

There was no comparison. It was so unique. Nobody else was doing anything like that.

Tangerine Dream p28

The story of how 1974's *Phaedra* helped them rule the planet!

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NICK MASON'S SAUCERFUL OF SECRETS

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Krizla from Tusmørke & Chronicles of Father Robin
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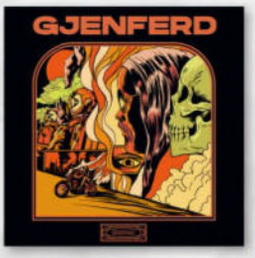

GJENFERD
Gjenferd
Debut album from retro rockers from Bergen feat. members from Kryptograf and Metusalem
Out 10/5

SUNFACE
Cloud Castles
Psych/ stoner from Oslo
Out 19/4

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Ein Fix Ferdig Mann
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THE DREDGE
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Debut album from post-rockers from Bergen
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PROG PRESENTS...

Discovering

Legendary proggers Pallas have been purveying their unique brand of powerful melodic progressive rock since the late 70s all the way through to their current tour de force, *The Messenger*.

On Bandcamp, they have curated a comprehensive set of digital downloads that include demos, rough mixes and live versions of material from their formation through to exclusive releases of their most recent albums.

This exclusive sampler features a unique insight into the development of the band with tracks taken from many of these digital albums. On it, Pallas showcase demo versions and rough mixes of tracks from the *Arrive Alive* and *The Sentinel* periods right through to *Messenger MegaMix* from their latest album, *The Messenger*, which is out now on CD and digital download.

Scan here to download or follow the instructions on the right

How to download your free digital sampler from Pallas

1. Visit www.bit.ly/pallas_sampler
2. Click 'Buy Digital Album' and enter '0' as the price.
3. Enter your email address and country, then download the album to your computer
4. Enjoy your new music! Discover more music from Pallas by visiting pallasofficial.bandcamp.com

What's on your free Pallas digital album

Download the 23-track sampler from www.bit.ly/pallas_sampler

1 *Messenger MegaMix*
Taken from *The Messenger*

2 *Ghosts Of Atlantis*
Taken from *Fragments Of The Sun*

3 *Ark Of Infinity*
Taken from *The Edge Of Time*

4 *Ghostdancers (Violin Mix)*
Taken from *The Edge Of Time*

5 *Wearewho weare MegaMix*
Taken from *Wearewhoweare*

6 *Dominion (Instrumental Mix)*
Taken from *Itiswhatitis*

7 *New Life*
Taken from *Wearewhoweare*

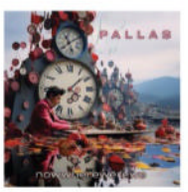
8 *XXV Parts 1 & 2 MegaMix*
Taken from *XXV (Bonus Track)*

9 *Invincible (2020 Mix)*
Taken from *Nowwherewerewe*

10 *Too Close To The Sun (2020 Mix)*
Taken from *Nowwherewerewe*

11 *The Greater Glory (Rough Mix)*
Taken from *Nowwherewerewe*

12 *The Cross And The Crucible (Rough Mix)*
Taken from *Nowwherewerewe*

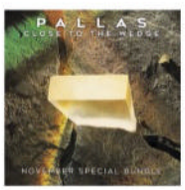


13 *Beat The Drum (Rough Mix)*
Taken from *Nowwherewerewe*

14 *Insomniac (Live)*
Taken from *Live Our Lives*

15 *Refugee*
Taken from *Mike Stobbie: Compendium*

16 *Rat Racing (Rough Mix)*
Taken from *Close To The Wedge*



17 *Executioner (Rough Mix)*
Taken from *Close To The Wedge*

18 *Atlantis (Rough Mix)*
Taken from *The Sentinel Rough Mixes*

19 *March On Atlantis (Live)*
Taken from *The Sentinel Demos*

20 *Crown Of Thorns (1981)*
Taken from *Arriving Alive*

21 *The Ripper (Extended Jam)*
Taken from *The Arrive Alive Demos*

22 *King Across The Water (1977)*
Taken from *Mike Stobbie: Compendium*

23 *Rags To Rags (1977)*
Taken from *Mike Stobbie: Compendium*

Ed's Letter

Spotify

Stream the Prog 148 playlist at www.spoti.fi/3URTZZv

Hello and welcome to the latest issue of *Prog*. Can you believe we're 15 years old this issue? The first issue of prog appeared back in March 2009, and here we still are, going strong in 2024. So, happy birthday to us! The eagle-eyed among you may have noticed we're rapidly approaching issue 150, too. I'll talk more about that in that landmark issue.

I can still remember the first time I became aware of Tangerine Dream, as a young teenager watching *The Old Grey Whistle Test* on the BBC. The sight of three men hunched over keyboards making these otherworldly sounds... mindblowing! Chris Wheatley speaks to the band's Peter Baumann; Steven Wilson, who remixed the original album; Edgar Froese's widow, Bianca; ambient pioneer Steve Roach and more as we explore how Tangerine Dream became such a dominant force in music at the time. Read our cover feature on p28.

Elsewhere, the delightful Chester Thompson chats about his time with Frank Zappa, Weather Report and, of course, Genesis; Stackridge tell the story of their *The Man In The Bowler Hat* album; Bill Nelson tells us he's still got plenty left in the tank and Big Big Train reveal their first full album with new singer Alberto Bravin.

All this, plus The Pineapple Thief, Damian Wilson and Adam Wakeman, Chelsea Wolfe, Kyros, Ihsahn, District 97 and Fish On Friday bring us up to speed with their new releases.

Do enjoy our free, downloadable Pallas sampler – band manager Mike Bentley has trawled the vaults to create a tracklist that traverses their history from their pre-*Arrive Alive* days right up to the modern day, with the band reunited with vocalist Alan Reed. Thanks, Mike!

Prog's back with a new issue on April 12. Hope you'll join us for that one too. Until then, as always, take care and prog on...

Jerry Ewing – Editor

NEXT ISSUE APR 12 ON SALE

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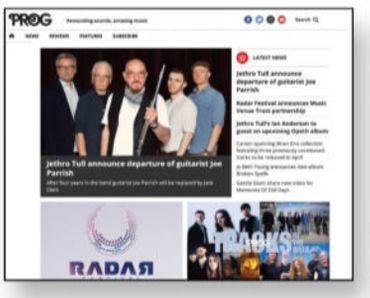

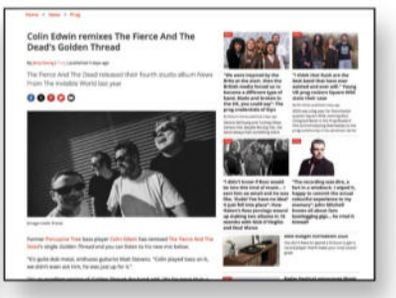

BIG BIG TRAIN

THE LIKES OF US

In Stores Now

The brand new studio album from the progressive rock collective featuring **Gregory Spawton**, **Alberto Bravin** (ex-PFM), **Nick D'Virgilio** (ex-Spock's Beard), **Rikard Sjöblom** (Beardfish), **Clare Lindley** (ex-Stackridge), **Dave Foster** (Steve Rothery Band) & **Oskar Holldorff** (Dim Gray).

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25/09 – Manchester

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WHOM GODS DESTROY

INSANIUM

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WHAT ABOUT THE SYNTH REVIVAL?

Regarding *Prog* 146: I wonder, is the term 'prog revival' a contradiction in terms? It raises the interesting question as to whether most prog is really revivalism, rather than taking things forward.

The article on the 80s prog revival, indeed, only seemed to look at acts who revived a traditional 70s live band format, plus a lead singer with Peter Gabriel-like facepaint and head gear. This went against the grain of the 80s synth era, though. I think you missed an opportunity to maybe feature the many other artists of the era who could validly be considered to be in the prog vein. I am thinking of artists like Howard Jones, Nik Kershaw, Tears For Fears, Talk Talk, China Crisis (or even Kate Bush). However, those acts did adopt mainstream pop-style codes, which appears to be unforgivable in the eyes of prog purists.

Having said that, quite a lot of 80s Genesis had a slightly techno/pop feel to it (but they were considered to have 'sold out' by many). Also, Peter Gabriel appears to somehow have prog credibility but he was largely a pop artist when he was solo.

In my opinion it is not valid to only view music through the lens of 1970s style band line-ups and technologies. Authentic prog surely can't be based purely around image or specific types of instrumentation. If we only have that, we'll end up with artists who are mere caricatures.

Tim Hunter, Knaresborough

THE GREATEST MINDS

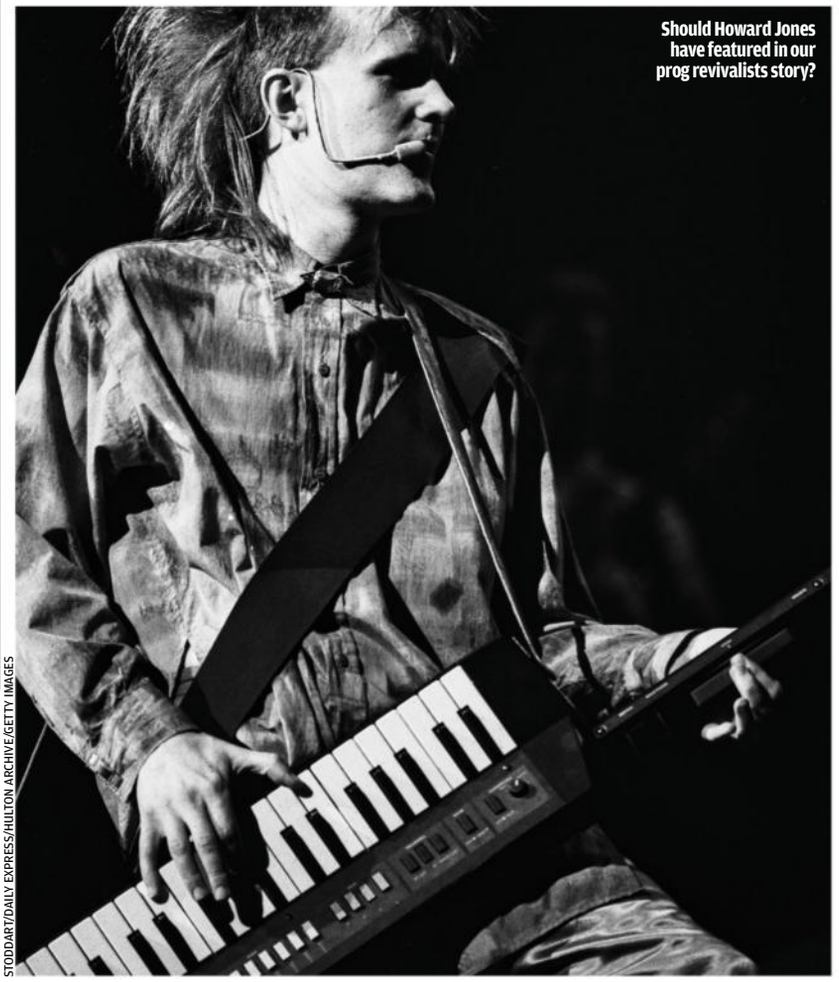
Many thanks to Jonathan Wilson for giving a shout-out for Jim Pembroke and Wigwam [My Prog, *Prog* 147]. He's a great musician and obviously has superb taste.

It would be wonderful if Jonathan did a Pembroke song on one of his excellent covers EPs, and it would also be wonderful if *Prog* did an in-depth article on Pembroke/Wigwam. Jim was probably the greatest English songwriter that most English people have never heard of, his intelligent, often humorous lyrics put him on a par with Ray Davies (at least in this house). I'm sure that many *Prog* readers would become instant converts if they got to hear his stuff.

Nic Stayt, via email

LIGHT APPRECIATION

Having recently discovered the pleasure of listening to drone music (nod to Slowdive drummer Simon Scott), I was compelled to listen to *Acts Of Light* by Hilary Woods following the review in *Prog* 147.



Should Howard Jones have featured in our prog revivalists story?

STODDART/DAILY EXPRESS/HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES

So glad I did. What a fantastic album. I appreciate drone will not be to every reader's liking. Indeed, my wife says it makes her want to smash my phone when I'm listening to it. However, big thanks to *Prog* for bringing this album to my attention. Hopefully my phone will survive the next listening. Maybe in the next Readers' Poll there could be a best drone category? I would like to see Marillion win that one!

Keith Lugton, via email

WHERE'S BRANDI?

On December 1, I went to the Cheese & Grain in Frome to see Gong and Ozric Tentacles. I like both bands. Gong came on first and they were very good. Next was the Ozrics, but where was the bass player Brandi Wynne? She's on the new CD, *Lotus Unfolding* [but when] I went to their merchandise desk. I was told she was no longer in the band. The set was too loud and I'll not come to see Ozrics again while she is not there. The venue is 100 miles from where I live. If I knew she had left I would have stayed at home.

T Perkins, Dunstable

We're sorry you missed out on seeing Brandi. We understand that the revolving collective's former bassist Vinny Shillito has returned to the Ozrics fold and he can be found playing with them on their upcoming tour dates. — Dep.Ed

GO AHEAD!

January brought me another great issue of *Prog*! Some older stuff I love, and, as always, a host of new people I have never heard of that I need to investigate.

But, what you need to investigate (and then give us an article on) is Go. I know I've pestered you enough about this band, but, come on! Steve Winwood? Al Di Meola? Michael Shrieve? Klaus Schulze? Stomu Yamashta? Two great studio albums, one fantastic live album, and no coverage anywhere so far that I am aware of. I believe most of the members are still around, so what is it going to take?

Ken Meyer Jr, Santa Ana, CA, USA

What a fantastic band Go were, Ken. We tried to get an interview with Stomu when Esoteric reissued the box set of his solo albums only to be told he's something of a recluse and doesn't do interviews. — Ed.

One aspect that deserves a little coverage is sampler albums and, more widely, how people find non-mainstream music they might enjoy. Nowadays, it's a simple matter of going through music streaming sites to listen to bands/genres that take one's fancy without major outlay or effort. I'm enjoying catching up on obscure material from the 60s and 70s to which I had no access at the time —back in the day it was a real challenge to find more of what you might like. A few notable radio shows, friends who had new LPs or ideas from reading the music press were all somewhat hit and miss. I bought albums speculatively at our local Woolworths based purely on interesting instrumentation (Marsupilami, Jade Warrior, Incredible String Band spring to mind as examples). That's where those sampler albums periodically issued by record labels were so influential.

Most samplers were diverse compilations and some outright random. Some Island samplers, such as *Bumpers* and *El Pea*, were absolute classics, as were Harvest (*Picnic*) and Vertigo (*The Vertigo 1970 Annual*) while others such as Charisma and Virgin were often deliberately obtuse carrying classical, comedy, folk as well as rock tracks often on the same side of vinyl. Decades later, and with a bit more disposable income, I found myself buying albums first promoted on these various samplers.

In the late 70s and 80s the music press, especially *Sounds*, issued some interesting vinyl compilations before the CD wave hit, which included both interesting new material and samplers based on old tracks, as well as repackaged variants of the originals. I'd love to see *Prog* do an in-depth on the subject.

Allen Armstrong, Buckhaven, Fife

This issue's star letter wins a goodie bag from burningshed.com *Contents may vary*

CALLING ALL MY HEROES

I loved the *Prog* 146 cover story about the prog revival, but whaaaat?! No mention of It Bites! Sure, they were almost as 'pop' as 'prog' and didn't really flower until '86/87 but, musically, they were streets ahead of those other early-80s outfits. Including you-know-who. "When they do the sweeping, grandiose stuff with complex arrangements, It Bites certainly do wipe the floor with the Marillions of this world." Not my words, but the words of Mr Ian Anderson in *Raw* magazine, 1990.

Matt Phillips, via email

As great as It Bites are, Matt, they were never really regarded as being part of the whole 80s prog revival scene. But hope you enjoyed the big interview with Francis last issue. — Ed.

DEFINING THE UNDEFINABLE

I think it would be nice, as well as informative, if you wrote an article about how prog music is defined: what makes a band prog or not. For instance, one of my favourite American bands is Crack The Sky, and everything I read about them, defines them as progressive music! And I just consider them a great rock band. What's prog about them? I get really confused about progressive metal. A number of progressive metal bands I've listened to, I would consider metal or heavy metal or growling metal, so what makes them progressive metal?

Maybe an article that simply defines the genre, and gives good examples as to why they are labelled as they are, might be helpful to some of us? Or maybe you can refer me to a good resource online that will explain some of those things?

I'm one of the old-timers — I'll be 69 in a couple of weeks — so I grew up with Genesis, Jethro Tull, Yes, ELP, King Crimson, and everyone in that group — and continued to follow all of them through their careers, but was completely oblivious to progressive music in the 80. I was re-introduced to the style through Neal Morse, and then Spock's Beard, Transatlantic, The Flower Kings, IQ, Arena and so on. I was overwhelmed by all the great music that was out there, amazing stuff, and that's why I look forward to each issue of *Prog*.

Randall Evans, via email

MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES

Crack The Sky in May 1978. Great band... but are they prog?

LONG LIVE PROG

I did not like the tone or the content of Nik Brückner's letter in *Prog* 146. Why do us old farts still like to listen to and go to gigs by these really old bands? Because, quite simply, it's the best prog music that has ever been made, and some of it will never be surpassed. Why do people still listen to Mozart, Brahms, et al.? (Most of those guys are dead, too...). Because their music is classic, timeless, for the ages. The same applies to much of the often fantastic music produced in the 70s.

I love much of the music being made by modern prog bands, but still keep going back to where it all started. Another gripe some have about the older bands is that they're not made up of original members, and are only tribute bands (Yes, Nektar, etc). Well, when you listen to a Mozart CD or go to a concert of his music, he's rarely present. It's the music that is important, and how glad am I that these musicians strive to make this music live on! Having been to Night Of The Prog and Cruise To The Edge numerous times, I'm lucky to have seen several of my favourite bands, and having them in one place is pure delight. So long live prog, and the bands that started it all over 50 years ago!

Pierre Widmer, Switzerland

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INTRO

IF IT'S OUT THERE, IT'S IN HERE

OLIVER WAKEMAN IS ROLLING IN CLOVER

The celebrated keyboardist and multi-instrumentalist flavours his first solo album in 20 years with celtic influences with a little help from his friends.

Oliver Wakeman has teamed up with vocalist Hayley Griffiths and Nightwish's Troy Donockley for his first solo album in almost 20 years.

Released on May 17 via Spirit Of Unicorn Music, the celtic-inspired *Anam Cara* is the first LP to be billed under the keyboard player and multi-instrumentalist's name since 2005's *Mother's Ruin*. It follows collaborations with the likes of Gordon Giltrap, Rodney Matthews (on the *Trinity* project) and Arena/Pendragon keyboard player Clive Nolan, as well as a stint in Yes between 2008 and 2011.

"I see it as a sort of spiritual sequel to *The Three Ages Of Magick* [his 2001 collaboration with Yes guitarist Steve Howe], even though it's a completely different type of record," Wakeman tells *Prog*. "On that one I used whistles and a violinist and a Uilleann pipe player, and it worked really well. I went back and listened to it when I did the box sets, and it sort of stoked that fire in me to use those instruments again."

Aman Cara wears its celtic influences heavily, both musically and in the album title, which roughly translates as 'soul friend.'

"It's fitting, because the songs are about interactions between people," he says. "There's songs about people being away from each other, about people from the past who are no longer with us, there's even a song about a love triangle. The songs are all little vignettes. It's not a concept album, but there is a theme around the idea of the soul friend, someone who is looking for something, a connection."

Opening track, *The View From Here*, dates back to 2002, when it was recorded in a different form with vocalist Rachel Williams ("I've completely rewritten parts of it, but the chorus is still recognisable," says Wakeman). Others are more recent, including the album's eight-minute centrepiece *Marble Arch*, which centres around a love triangle.

"I've basically been writing all these pieces of music over the years – I'd think, Well, that fits that sort of spiritual, celtic thing, so I'll save it with all the other songs that are along the same lines," says Wakeman. "Then a year or two ago, I listened to them all and thought, 'Oh, they sound pretty good.' Then you get into it, and actually you end up rewriting half the stuff!"

Wakeman enlisted vocalist Hayley Griffiths to sing on *Anam Cara* after being introduced to her music via a mutual friend.

"She's done rock stuff, she's done classical stuff, she's done *Riverdance* – there's an incredible versatility and depth of control to her voice that I needed."

Other musicians appearing on the album include guitarist and regular Wakeman collaborator Dave Mark Pearce, fellow guitarist

Oliver Wakeman widens his connections on upcoming album.

"I see it as a sort of spiritual sequel to *The Three Ages Of Magick*."

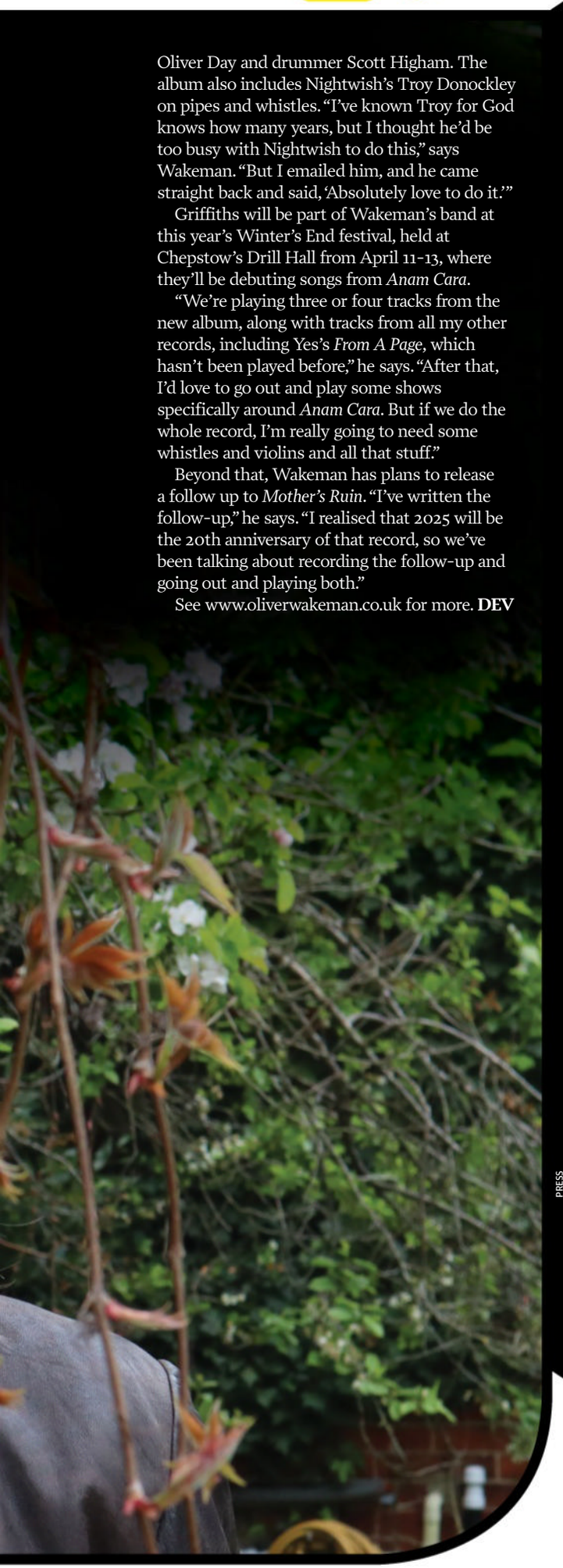
Oliver Day and drummer Scott Higham. The album also includes Nightwish's Troy Donockley on pipes and whistles. "I've known Troy for God knows how many years, but I thought he'd be too busy with Nightwish to do this," says Wakeman. "But I emailed him, and he came straight back and said, 'Absolutely love to do it.'"

Griffiths will be part of Wakeman's band at this year's Winter's End festival, held at Chepstow's Drill Hall from April 11-13, where they'll be debuting songs from *Anam Cara*.

"We're playing three or four tracks from the new album, along with tracks from all my other records, including Yes's *From A Page*, which hasn't been played before," he says. "After that, I'd love to go out and play some shows specifically around *Anam Cara*. But if we do the whole record, I'm really going to need some whistles and violins and all that stuff."

Beyond that, Wakeman has plans to release a follow up to *Mother's Ruin*. "I've written the follow-up," he says. "I realised that 2025 will be the 20th anniversary of that record, so we've been talking about recording the follow-up and going out and playing both."

See www.oliverwakeman.co.uk for more. **DEV**



PRESS

This month, Intro was compiled by

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ZOMBI RETURN FROM THE DEAD

Pittsburgh's synth-prog duo release their first album in four years.

Zombi make the most of being able to jam together again.

PRESS/SHAWN BRACKBILL

US progressive/electronic duo Zombi will release their next full-length album, *Direct Inject*, via Relapse Records on March 22. The follow-up to *2020* (issued in 2020) and mini-album *Liquid Crystal* (2021) was written in a more collaborative and spontaneous way than its immediate predecessors, thanks to the end of the pandemic.

"This album was good because we were able to sit down in the same room and just roll tape, play and dissect it all after," drummer Anthony Paterra tells *Prog*. "*2020* and *Liquid Crystal*, those were done composing on our own, sending ideas back and forth. Steve [Moore, synth/bass] writes something, I put drums to it, maybe I add something else – that whole file-sharing kind of set-up."

Direct Inject's title is an homage to the improvisational spirit that Zombi brought to their new music. Beyond that, Moore states there's no overarching concept or narrative to the album, and that he wants the listener to have their own ideas as to what the songs are about.

"One of the hardest things that we ever have to do is come up with song titles, or an album title," he says. "We want people to be able to pull whatever they want from the songs and to make things a little bit more open to interpretation."

Paterra adds, "Whatever happens happens, and I think it always ends up with something of a cinematic feel that's akin to a film score."

See www.zombi.bandcamp.com for more. **MM**

ANDY LATIMER GUESTS ON NEW BASS & BIRO ALBUM

More and Daniel Biro solo record due for release this spring.

Camel bassist Colin Bass and composer and keyboard player Daniel Biro will release a brand-new collaborative album, *More* through the Sargasso label later this spring. It's the second full-length record from the pair, following their 2020 debut, *Still*. The new album features Bass's Camel colleague Andy Latimer, who lends his distinctive tone to four tracks.

Meanwhile Biro himself will release a new solo album, *Hotel Erika*, through Sargasso on March 15. It's described as "an epic synth instrumental suite that harks back to the days of 1970s kosmische electronic pioneers like Tangerine Dream and Klaus Schulze, as well as Euro-jazz experimentations". The new album has been inspired by a past childhood holiday destination in the heart of the Slovenian Alps.

Bringing you More in May! Colin Bass and Daniel Biro.

Biro recalls, "Hotel Erika was an old chalet in a forest clearing near the village of Kranjska Gora. It was a modest yet magical retreat."

See www.colinbass.bandcamp.com. **JE**

PRESS

CAN SINGER DAMO SUZUKI DEAD AT 74

An influential figure, he remained an inquisitive musical spirit to the end.

Damo Suzuki (far left): a unique and charasmatic figure.

CAN ARCHIVES/SPOON RECORDS

Damo Suzuki, former lead singer for pioneering German band Can, has died of cancer at the age of 74. His passing was confirmed on February 10 on Can's social media pages. He had been fighting colon cancer for a decade and had been given a 10 per cent chance of survival.

"It is with great sadness that we have to announce the passing of our wonderful friend Damo Suzuki, yesterday, Friday 9 February, 2024," the post read. "His boundless creative energy has touched so many over the whole world, not just with Can, but also with his all-continents spanning Network Tour. Damo's kind soul and cheeky smile will be forever missed. He will be joining Michael [Karoli], Jaki [Liebezeit] and Holger [Czukay] for a fantastic jam!"

Born Kenji Suzuki in 1950 to an architect father and housewife mother, he left his native Japan the day after his 18th birthday and spent the next two years travelling across Sweden, England and Ireland before arriving in Germany in 1970 where his life was to alter forever. Busking outside a café in Munich, he was spotted by Can bassist Holger Czukay and their drummer Jaki Liebezeit.

Their original vocalist, Malcolm Mooney, had quit the band after singing on their 1969 debut album, *Monster Movie*. Impressed with Suzuki's street performance, the pair invited him to join them onstage that night, which he did without any rehearsal. His improvisational style of singing, which incorporated English as well as his first language of Japanese, suited Can well — their own style mixed spontaneous composition, tape manipulation and experimentation — and so he joined them for what is widely regarded as their creative high-water mark with the albums *Tago Mago* (1971), *Ege Bamyasi* (1972) and *Future Days* (1973).

Having quit Can in 1973, Suzuki became a Jehovah's Witness, got married and took a decade-long break from music as he moved from one job to the next. He underwent surgery for colon cancer in 1983 and returned to music by playing improvised shows alongside local musicians under the name Damo Suzuki's Network or The Damo Suzuki Band as he continued to tour. He also played with a number of established bands including post-rockers Mogwai.

Despite the return of his illness in 2014, Damo Suzuki continued to tour and record until the start of the pandemic. He's survived by his wife, Elke Morsbach. **JM**

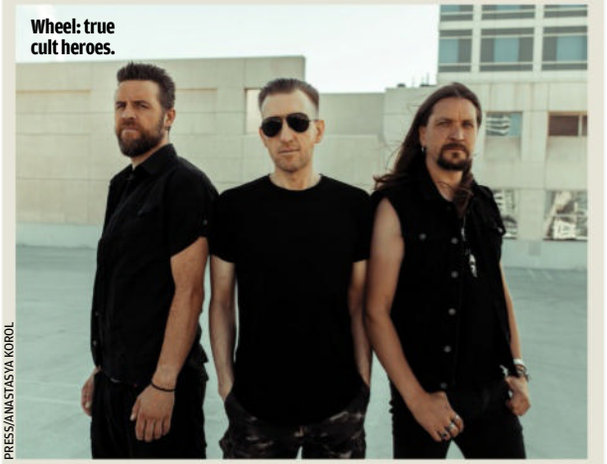
See www.spoonrecords.com for more.

"Damo Suzuki's boundless creative energy has touched so many over the whole world."

INTRO extras

SAUCERFUL OF SECRETS SET THE CONTROLS TO TOUR

Nick Mason's Saucerful Of Secrets have announced a run of UK and European tour dates for June and July. The Pink Floyd drummer's live project kicks off the Set The Controls tour at Stoke's Victoria Hall on June 11 and their jaunt ends at London's Royal Albert Hall on June 29. They play Italy and Germany in July. See www.bit.ly/sos_band for more information.



Wheel: true cult heroes.

PRESS/ANASTASYA KOROL

WHEEL GET ANGRY ON "OUT THERE" LP

Band balance their heaviest music to date with their most conscious lyrical content.

Finnish prog metal act Wheel return with their third album, *Charismatic Leaders*, which promises to be their angriest and most "out there" recording yet. Releasing on May 3 via InsideOutMusic, it finds the band with plenty to say.

"Over the past few years, cult leaders have been appearing in the strangest ways," says guitarist/vocalist James Lascelles of the record's loose lyrical concept. "We see them wherever there's a subset of followers and an ideology, and they a huge impact on today's society."

From searing rage at Rupert Murdoch (*Empire*) to helplessly watching disaster unfold on the other side of the world (*The Freeze*), the follow-up to 2021's *Resident Human* is iced with an outraged freneticism.

"*Empire* is me venting my frustrations at the world," Lascelles says. "It repeatedly finds new ways to slap you in the face."

Daniel Bergstrand, Meshuggah guitarist Fredrik Thordendal and Joonas Parkkonen all receive production credits. While Thordendal was the guitar tone master, Parkkonen's production experience helped counterbalance their aggression.

"The instrumentals are very complicated," underlines Lascelles, "so we've streamlined the vocals. Joonas had a lot of input on how their arrangement and harmonies so that you don't need a music degree to get something out of the record. There's a real mixture of songs, but it works as a journey. I love it."

See wheelband.net for more information. **POW**

TRANSATLANTIC ANNOUNCE EPIC NEW LIVE ALBUM

The multi-disc collection is rumoured to be their last release.

Prog supergroup Transatlantic have announced what is allegedly their final record. *Live At Morsefest 2022: The Absolute Whirlwind* comes out via InsideOutMusic on April 26.

Available as a limited five-CD and two-Blu-ray artbook, the album contains both of the band's sets from their own Morsefest event in 2022 and weighs in with almost four-and-a-half hours of music.

Enthusing about the release, drummer Mike Portnoy says, "This release of Transatlantic at Morsefest 2022 represents the most epic and mammoth of all Transatlantic's live releases. Two nights, two completely different sets, two Transatlantic concept albums done in their entirety and accompanied with strings, horns, percussion and female vocals. We've always been about 'more is never is enough,' but this is the ultimate live Transatlantic experience."

See www.transatlanticweb.com. **JM**

Transatlantic: is this their final farewell?

PRESS/JOEL BARRIOS

STEVE HACKETT

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TUE 15 YORK BARBICAN
WED 16 NOTTINGHAM ROYAL CONCERT HALL
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A KILIMANJARO PRESENTATION BY ARRANGEMENT WITH SOLO

POWER TRIO SIX BY SIX GROW STRONGER

The band kick back against "difficult second album" syndrome.

Six By Six: second time's a charm.

PRESS/DAVE LEPORI

Six By Six return with their "harder kicking" second album, *Beyond Shadowland* on April 16 after the supergroup shrugged off worries about a difficult second album. Following on from the 2022's well-received self-titled debut, keyboardist/vocalist Robert Berry says the three-pice, completed by Saga guitarist Ian Crichton and Saxon drummer, Nigel Glockler, became a stronger unit through heightened collaboration.

"When the band got put together, the chemistry worked right off. It was magical. So, the hardest thing was thinking about the success of the first album," Berry reveals.

"The only parameter was to not make the same album again, retain who we are and we move it forward. The big change was that Nigel brought some songs in. I wish I could say that we learned a lot and we struggled a lot with this album, but really, the more collaborative approach pulled us all together."

He continues, "Ian and I are a little bit like a Lennon and McCartney in the way we put our pieces together. There's something cracked about Ian that makes him a genius. When he comes up with his parts you think, 'Why would you even do that?' I see myself as the glue for all his ideas. Then Nigel comes in and he's got one of my favourite songs on the album called *Titans*. It's totally different from most of the stuff we do, but we want to take risks."

Pieced together at Berry's Soundtek Studios in San Francisco, the keyboardist says they've continued with their dogged DIY spirit.

"We were put together for a reason," says Berry. "We get to do what we want and no one says 'no'. If people don't like the new album, that's gonna hurt, but I think they're gonna like it.

"There's a lot, especially on the guitar level, to dig deep into. It might take a couple listens for people to like it as much as the first album, because it had a few more delicate spots and this one is harder kicking, but the songs are so powerful. We're a stronger band this time."

Released via InsideOutMusic, *Beyond Shadowland* will be available on CD, streaming and double-vinyl formats. The 180g vinyl features bonus material including a "beautiful" orchestral medley of the album's pieces scored by Berry. **POW**

"The only parameter was not to make the same album again and move forward."

See www.sixbysixband.com for pre-orders and more information.

INTRO extras

FOLLOW-UP DUE FOR CHINA'S OU

Arriving two years after their debut album, *One*, Chinese prog metallers OU have announced the release of their new recording, *II: Frailty*. It's out on April 26 via InsideOutMusic. The new LP will be available on a variety formats including 180g white-black vinyl. See www.facebook.com/ou.theband for more details.

Trifecta: turning 'weird shit' into the new normal.

PRESS/HAJO MUELLER

TRIFECTA ARE BACK WITH SECOND LP

The New Normal features a guest appearance by Rush guitarist Alex Lifeson.

Nick Beggs – bassist and vocalist with prog fusion supergroup Trifecta – has given an insight into the creative process behind the band's second album, *The New Normal*, which is released through Kscope on April 12.

"I've got a list of titles of songs to be written and I'm always adding to them," he tells *Prog*. "I went, 'Oh yeah! I haven't said nearly enough about stroboscopic fennel.' And it went on like that. I just picked the titles and before we knew where we were in a worrying cul-de-sac. I said to the guys [keyboardist Adam Holzman and drummer Crag Blundell], 'I don't know if the record label are going to go for this because this [new music] is just too weird.' And do you know what? I think it's the weird shit that sold it to them!"

Adding to the 19-track album's intrigue is a guest appearance by Rush guitarist Alex Lifeson who became friendly with Beggs when the bassist played with Steven Wilson and his band at the Massey Hall in Toronto.

"Alex is such a sweetheart," says Beggs. "He just wants to play music and he said, 'If you've got any stuff that you want me to contribute to...' I'd done a bit of file sharing with him over the years and he said, 'I really like this song, *Once Around The Sun With You*. It's got a nostalgic aspect that really rings with me.' He made all these beautiful additional guitar overdubs to it and really made it sparkle."

See www.kscopemusic.bandcamp.com. **JM**

CARL PALMER CAREER-SPANNING BOX SET IN APRIL

Fanfare For The Common Man includes his autobiography.

Emerson, Lake & Palmer drummer Carl Palmer is to have a career-spanning box set released through BMG on April 5. *Fanfare For The Common Man* will be available on a three-CD and one-Blu-ray set.

The new anthology explores Palmer's time as one-third of ELP, but also stretches back to include freakbeat band The Craig and features tracks from Palmer's period with Chris Farlowe, Atomic Rooster, as well as post-ELP bands such as PM, Asia, 3 and working with Mike Oldfield, The Buddy Rich Orchestra and both Carl Palmer Band and Carl Palmer's ELP Legacy.

The visual side of the set includes *The Rhythm Of Life*, a documentary narrated by Palmer himself with live and exclusive behind-the-scenes footage featuring ELP, Asia, Crazy World Of Arthur Brown, Carl Palmer Band and more. Palmer's own 200-page autobiography is also included.

See www.carlpalmer.com for more information and to pre-order. **JE**

Carl Palmer: in the drumming hot seat.

PRESS/BRUCE PILATO

FAD GADGETS

Rhodri Marsden on three of the latest must-have gizmos currently putting the prog in progress.

ALPHATHETA WAVE-EIGHT

My days of attending parties in remote locations are long gone, and my memory of one in particular on a Welsh mountain is best forgotten, but one measure of technological advancement is the ability to keep such gatherings entertained with banging tunes until the sun comes up. AlphaTheta, formerly known as Pioneer DJ, now bring us a 110W portable speaker boasting ultra-low latency wireless connectivity: that means it's usable by DJs who would normally shun wireless speakers (on account of the delay between pressing 'go' and the music starting). It has eight hours of battery life, which, let's face it, is loads.

www.alphatheta.com

VOX APC-1

We recently featured the Ciari Ascender, a travel guitar that folds in half, but you still needed an amp to be able to hear it. This teardrop-styled model from Vox doesn't fold in half, but does come with a built-in speaker and a modelling amp: clean and dirty tones, chorus, tremolo, delay, reverb and so on. The built-in rhythm box with a tempo knob and presets such as 'funk' and 'blues' veers dangerously close to twee Portasound territory, but the guitar itself sounds magnificent, and it looks great (if channelling Brian Jones is your thing).

www.voxamps.com

STYLOPHONE THEREMIN

The lingering nostalgia for the Stylophone brand has prompted the company behind it, Dubreq, to put out a whole range of Stylophone-adjacent instruments in recent years. This is the latest, a theremin which stays true to the spirit of the original in one way – i.e. the pitch is controlled by the proximity of your hand to its antenna – but then throws in a whole bunch of extras, including waveform shaping, vibrato levels and delay, enabling spooky sci-fi sounds out of the box. Clara Rockmore may be turning in her grave, but it's cheap (£100), cheerful and fun

www.stylophone.com

MY PROG HERO

Inspiring the wider music world...

MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

You'd better believe it: John Robb (inset) has been into Hawkwind all these years.

PRESS

JOHN ROBB

The Membranes bassist, journalist and author goes triple bad acid, yeah, when it comes to his adoration and respect of the mighty **Hawkwind**.

I first heard Hawkwind when I was at school and *Silver Machine* came up on my radar. That was just the most unlikely hit from a band that's not meant to have a hit. I don't know who was more surprised: them or their audience! And suddenly they'd made it, which did bring about additional pressures; you could trace Lemmy's eventual exit from the band because of that massive hit.

They just seemed like a gonzoid version of glam rock: how would you know about underground squat culture and free festivals growing up in Blackpool when you're 11 years old? But there was always a clutch of older kids you'd get the bus to school with who wore green or blue army greatcoats and they'd write the names of the bands in biro on their little army bags. They'd have Gong and the Yes logo on there, but Hawkwind were really their thing.

When punk started, they were one of the bands that survived. I think that's because you could perceive their music as being simplistic because it was built around endless bass lines and guitar riffs, but they're much more musical than people think. It made them proto-punk and they fitted right into that scene. And then those kids with the greatcoats started wearing lab coats, which was that Hawkwind look at the time. They had their own little scene that kind of mixed with the punk crowd. When you're in a small town, all the little scenes didn't fight like people always say. We'd swap records and go round each other's houses doing magic mushrooms and getting stoned and Hawkwind's music would always be there. They were like the gateway band to all of those scenes.

Hawkwind are a genuinely great psychedelic band — The Membranes have played Hawkfest about three times — and they're as good now as ever. Every time I've seen them, the line-up seems to have totally changed again but they still sound really great. Dave Brock has that necessary inner steel. **JM**

> **"Hawkwind are as good now as they ever were. They still sound great."**

John Robb's spoken-word tour, Do You Believe In The Power Of Rock'n'Roll, starts in March and runs until the end of May. See www.facebook.com/johnrobbofficial for details.

PROG IN BRIEF

KATE HOCKENHULL

Multi-instrumentalist **Alison Cotton** (right) releases her new album, *Engelchen*, via Rocket Recordings on March 13. It pays tribute to sisters Ida and Louise Cook who saved refugees from the Nazis in 1930s Germany. See www.linktr.ee/alison_cotton

Peter Baumann's first three solo albums – *Romance '76*, *Trans Harmonic Nights* and *Repeat Repeat* – are being re-released as *Phase By Phase – The Virgin Years*, a single three-CD box set via Esoteric on April 26. See www.bit.ly/baumann_box

Actor, author and broadcaster **Stephen Fry** narrates Finnish composer and musician **Lauri Porra**'s new concept album, *Matter And Time*, which is out on April 11 via Platoon. More details can be found at www.lauriporra.com

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HARP

Ex-Midlake man looks to medieval England and 80s music production for inspiration.

THE LONE FIGURE in a cloak holding an acoustic guitar on the cover of *Albion* might seem familiar. That's because it's Tim Smith, co-founder of alternative folk-rockers Midlake, and the artwork for his debut LP as Harp is inspired by ancient English history and some recognisable prog-folk sleeve art such as John and Beverley Martyn's *Stormbringer!* and John Boorman's 1981 medieval fantasy flick, *Excalibur*.

The image was taken on an iPad while out with his wife Kathi Zung "pretty close to our house in Durham, North Carolina, on a snowy day", Smith tells us on a Zoom call. "We thought, 'Let's just go take an example that could possibly be the cover. We really liked it, but it was poor quality, so we went back the next year but the snow and grass never looked the same, and I just couldn't stand the same way."

The image works in conveying the mystery of *Albion*, an album that took Smith over 10 years to complete following his departure from Midlake in 2012. Part folk, part electronica, Smith's aim was "to see if I could make something that I was really pleased with. I didn't quite feel that with Midlake stuff. I'm grateful for that music but I felt I could do better."

Smith was, and continues to be, on a quest. Looking for a musical Holy Grail, perhaps?

"I thought, 'I'll just be solo now and I'll make the album that I want to make.' That took forever [laughs]!"

Admitting that lyric-writing comes last for him, Smith details his songwriting method: "While I'm trying to formulate melodies, I usually just open a book of poetry and read along so I'm creating melodies using someone else's words. Sometimes the words are so good, they just stick and can't be topped, so I ended up using some William Blake for *Throne Of Amber*."

The challenge on *Albion* was melding the warmth of the 70s music Smith loved — a flute player since sixth grade, Jethro Tull have been a long-time favourite alongside Fairport Convention and Nick Drake — with the influence of 80s music such as Clannad (especially *Legend*, the *Robin Of Sherwood* soundtrack), The Smiths, Roxy Music and The Sundays. Utilising chorus on guitar helped, and the warmth of the Korg Polysix and Roland JX-3P — "That's the bell bottoms-style meets trench coats and grey skies," Smith says. The final touch was programmed drums courtesy of Zung, a successful stop-motion animator.

"Ninety per cent of the album was made with her by my side," Smith states. "I trust her, and it's good to have the second set of ears… producing is the hardest aspect for me. In 10 years I've learned a lot."

Led Zeppelin were also an influence, and their mucker Roy Harper, who inspired the act's name.

"I was into Roy Harper at the time — I still am! And my parents lived off Harper Road, so 'Harp' sounded good, and sounded right."

Meanwhile, with another record expected within a year, Harp's quest continues. **JK**

"Producing is the hardest aspect for me. In 10 years I've learned a lot."

PROG FILE

LINE-UP

Tim Smith *(keyboards, guitars, vocals)*, **Kathi Zung** *(vocals, drums)*

SOUNDS LIKE

Atmospheric, autumnal folk hymns, where Sandy Denny meets Cocteau Twins

CURRENT RELEASE

Albion is out now via Bella Union

WEBSITE

harpband.com

Harp's Kathi Zung and Tim Smith: let the battle commence!

PRESS/DAVID ZUNG

COLDPLAY

VIVA LA VIDA OR DEATH AND ALL HIS FRIENDS

(Parlophone, 2008)

Over the first five years of the new millennium, Coldplay went from nobodies to one of the world's biggest rock bands. Naturally, they were expected to continue cranking out radio-friendly hits with their fourth album, but instead, they sought to separate themselves from their opening trio of albums by enlisting the left-field production talents of Brian Eno. From their flirtations with Afropop and tribal rhythms to immersive electronic ambience and patient song structures, his sonic fingerprints are all over the record.

Interestingly, Chris Martin's vocals don't often sit as icing on top of this sonic cake. Rather, they're buried in among its reverb-soaked sponge, giving it an almost psych-rock flavour. Each song is allowed to rest and rise in its own time, rather than rush to that first chorus – something every pop songwriter will tell you is imperative. It makes repeat listens a rewarding experience, contrasting the fat-free, instantly engaging pop that had defined their career up until that point.

Densely layered instrumental *Life In Technicolor*, co-written with forward-thinking electronic artist, Jon Hopkins, carefully foreshadows what's to follow. *Cemeteries Of London* is equally dense but somehow finds space for Martin's vocals to swim through its swathing textures.

Lovers In Japan feels like watching a sunrise in slow motion. Its wall of droning guitars, skipping drums and shimmering tack piano, which coalesce for an acid-trip undercurrent, grows ever brighter as it progresses. *Yes*, meanwhile sounds like a precursor to the kind of psychedelic pop that Tame Impala would make a career out of just a few years later, and comes complete with a powerful Eastern string motif. Halfway through its seven-minute playtime, it morphs into the hypnotic and uncredited track, *Chinese Sleep Chant*, with the band's desire to surprise fans remaining strong. It's a far cry from the record's only real out-and-out pop song, *Viva La Vida*, which follows. It went on to win Song Of The Year at the 2009 Grammy Awards, its success all the stranger by being the record's black sheep – but offered proof that Coldplay could never go wholly experimental.

Hopkins returns on the final track, *Death And All His Friends*. It transcends its sparse beginnings for a brief frolic with stadium rock before Hopkins's oscillating and atmospheric synths see out the track in a fashion not too dissimilar to the sound Radiohead would explore on *King Of Limbs* some three years later.

Working with Eno clearly sparked something within the band, as they reunited for the sci-fi rock opera of its successor, *Mylo Xyloto*. They then returned to the sombre pop of their early success for 2014's *Ghost Stories* and haven't looked back since. This makes *Viva La Vida...* something of an enigma in the pop giants' discography and a very intriguing one at that.

PHIL WELLER

ALL AROUND THE WORLD

Our far-out trip to far-flung prog

Out of the darkness: Psychework light the spark of hope.

PRESS/SAM JÄMSEN

PSYCHEWORK

The Finnish sextet have battled against adversity to find hope in the face of almost overwhelming odds.

If anything has come to define Finnish prog metallers Psychework, then it has to be the undercurrent of optimism that runs through their music. Across three albums — *The Dragon's Year* (2016), *Karelian Hills* (2018) and 2023's *Spark Of Hope* — the sextet of singer Antony Parviainen, guitarists J-V Hintikka and Juha Takanen, Otto Närhi (keyboards), Konsta Vehkala (drums) and bassist Ville Koskinen have constantly come up victorious despite circumstances having the potential to dictate a very different outcome.

Hailing from the south-central city of Jyväskylä, Psychework formed following the split of Parviainen and Hintikka's former band, Machine Man.

"I got really sick with leukemia," says Parviainen, "and when I was in hospital, I got the idea for the new band. I called J-V and asked him what he thought about making melodic and symphonic kind of music, and he was in immediately. The whole thing started there. I wrote most of the lyrics for the first album in hospital."

Though not a concept album, Parviainen admits that his condition influenced some of the material on *The Dragon's Year*. However, Psychework's second album, *Karelian Hills* was an unapologetic concept album, dealing with the Continuation War — also known as the Second Soviet-Finnish War. Meanwhile, their current album lives up to its optimistic moniker.

"I felt that *Spark Of Hope* was the perfect title," says Parviainen. "If I think about the songs, in every one of them the meaning behind them is the search for hope."

Lyrical concerns aside, Parviainen is keen to stress the sense of drama that drives their material.

"It's the most important thing in our music," he says. "When I write lyrics, I want to find a really strong story and we want to put the drama in our music. I'll tell J-V the story and he'll write the music based on that. But he writes a lot, so sometimes I'll pick up on the melodies and riffs."

"I want to find a really strong story and put drama in our music."

He adds, "We're writing new music. I hope we don't wait five years for the next album." **JM**

See www.psychework.bandcamp.com for more.

PROG IN BRIEF

PRESS/RUBEN TERLOUW

Dutch artist and Nordic folk pioneer **Kati Rán** (right) releases her new 13-track, full-length album, *SÁLA* via Svart Records on May 24, which also features contributions from members of Sígur Rós among others. More at www.kati-ran.com

UK prog rockers **IQ** have announced a batch of live dates for both this year and 2025, including their traditional Christmas shows in Holland on December 14 and London on December 21. Full tour dates and ticket details at www.iq-hq.co.uk

PROG PRESENTS NEW MUSIC
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ROSE TIGER
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PROGZILLA RADIO
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PRESS/ELLA HERME

Ready, player one? L-R: Cyprien Jacquet, Domi Hawken, Irene Gonzalez.

ROSE TIGER

French-Anglo-Hispanic trio travel through the ages on fantastical rock opera debut.

ROSE TIGER AREN'T easy to pin down. The glam trio's debut album is a rock opera with prog leanings that could be described as a labour of love for its chief architect Cyprien Jacquet. *The End Forever* is a trashy, surrealist Gesamtkunstwerk that incorporates manga and videogames into its universe, as well as songs about dinosaurs and robots.

"Everybody always asks about the dinosaurs and robots," says Jacquet, hiding his exasperation well. "It's always the first thing we're asked about, but really, they're only on two or three songs out of a total of 14."

The End Forever project started as an imaginary land in Jacquet's head called Archaeopolis. While the Annecy-based musician has played drums with numerous bands in France over the years (including Nouvelle Vague and Air Bag One) he's been stealthily developing a secret world with this record.

"It's been there since my childhood," he admits, "with this story and this character Wend¥ Killman, who is my alter-ego. It's very much inspired by Japanese role-playing games from the first PlayStation, like *Final Fantasy VII* and *VIII* from the 90s."

Another influence is his father's record collection, which includes artists such as Queen, Frank Zappa, Black Sabbath and Deep Purple.

"When I started my music career in France, most people were a little allergic to prog, but when I made this album I was like, 'I don't care anymore, I'm just gonna do what I want.' I go back to my 70s roots, and you can really hear the prog influence on *I Won't Go Back*, especially on the intro and the drum fills."

When Jacquet moved to London in 2019 he recruited English singer and guitarist Domi Hawken, whom he knew from when she lived in Paris.

"I wasn't shocked [by the material] because it's Cyprien," says Hawken. "Nothing shocks me having known him for so long. But I was like, 'Really? You want to release an album singing about dinosaurs? Like, I love dinosaurs, but I just never thought I'd be onstage touring around France singing about them."

Irene Gonzalez, meanwhile, came on board after looking on Gumtree to find something to do alongside her summer job.

"I literally Googled 'band looking for singer and keyboard player in London', and it was the first thing that popped up. I hadn't used Gumtree before and I don't think I've used it since."

The trio were recording the album at Flood's studio in northwest London, at least until they ran out of money. Then came the pandemic and Jacquet found himself back in France thinking the project of his dreams was all but over. Luckily, in stepped French label Upton Park, who blew bubbles up Jacquet's derrière and told him to get the album finished and they'd pick up the tab.

"It never happens anymore, this kind of thing," he says, with a shrug.

What comes next for Rose Tiger remains to be seen, though Jacquet hopes it will be simpler:

"I feel like I've had enough writing about fairy tales and dinosaurs in post-apocalyptic worlds." **JA**

"I was like, 'Really? You want to release an album singing about dinosaurs?'"

PROG FILE

LINE-UP

Cyprien Jacquet *(vocals, drums)*, **Domi Hawken** *(guitars, vocals)*, **Irene Gonzalez** *(keyboards, vocals)*

SOUNDS LIKE

Big tunes that meet at the intersection of 70s glam and 80s electro

CURRENT RELEASE

The End Forever is out now on Upton Park

WEBSITE

www.facebook.com/rosetigermusic

Official Progressive Albums Chart

The prog top 30 albums

February 2024

Compiled by Official Charts Company

1	**PETER GABRIEL**	i/o *(REAL WORLD)*
2	**SLIFT**	Ilion *(SUB POP)*
3	**NO-MAN**	Swagger: Lost Not Lost Vol 1 1989/90 *(BURNING SHED)*
4	**STEVEN WILSON**	The Harmony Codex *(VIRGIN/SW RECORDS)*
5	**NO-MAN**	Housekeeping – The OLI Years 1990-1994 *(ONE LITTLE INDEPENDENT)*
6	**BRUCE SOORD**	Caught In The Hum *(BRUCESOORD.COM)*
7	**TAME IMPALA**	Lonerism *(FICTION)*
8	**CALIGULA'S HORSE**	Charcoal Grace *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
9	**WITHIN TEMPTATION**	Bleed Out *(FORCE MUSIC)*
10	**SPIRITUALIZED**	Amazing Grace *(FAT POSSUM)*
11	**MIKE OLDFIELD**	Tubular Bells – 50th Anniversary Edition *(UMC)*
12	**SIGUR RÓS**	Átta *(BMG)*
13	**ROGER WATERS**	The Dark Side Of The Moon Redux *(COOKING VINYL)*
14	**PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING**	This New Noise *(TEST CARD)*
15	**PLANTOID**	Terrapath *(BELLA UNION)*
16	**FAMILY**	It's Only A Movie *(ESOTERIC)*
17	**NEAL MORSE**	The Restoration – Joseph Pt 2 *(FRONTIERS)*
18	**TESSERACT**	War Of Being *(KSCOPE)*
19	**GOAT**	Medicine *(ROCKET RECORDINGS)*
20	**KING GIZZARD & LIZARD WIZARD**	PetroDragonic Apocalypse *(KGLW)*
21	**JETHRO TULL**	The Broadsword And The Beast *(PARLOPHONE)*
22	**YES**	Mirror To The Sky *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
23	**RUSH**	Signals *(WARNER MUSIC)*
24	**OPETH**	Damnation *(MUSIC FOR NATIONS)*
25	**JETHRO TULL**	RökFlöte *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
26	**PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING**	Inform Educate Entertain *(TEST CARD)*
27	**THE FLAMING LIPS**	Yoshimi Battles The Pink Robots *(WARNER MUSIC)*
28	**POLYPHIA**	Live At The Factory In Deep Ellum *(RISE)*
29	**PORCUPINE TREE**	Deadwing *(TRANSMISSION)*
30	**JEAN-MICHEL JARRE**	Oxymoreworks *(SONY MUSIC)*

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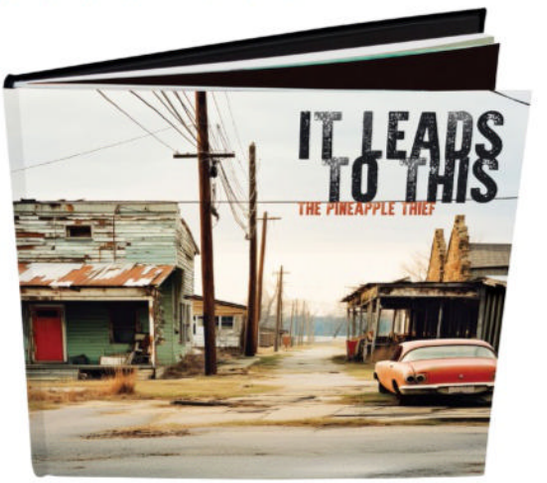


The Pineapple Thief's latest album, *It Leads To This*, was described by our reviewer as "a classy and very sombre collection", but don't just take our word for it: we've got a copy of the very limited, deluxe four-disc set to give away to one lucky reader this month.

In addition to the studio album – the story of which you can read all about on p40 of this issue – the set contains the bonus CD *Y Aqui Estamos*, which contains alternate versions of all the tracks. You'll also get a Blu-ray and DVD containing Bruce Soord's 5.1 stereo mixes of both the original and bonus albums, and it's all packaged with an exclusive 52-page book giving you the chance to experience the art-proggers' 25th-anniversary release in style.

To be in with a chance of winning this special prize, visit www.bit.ly/PROG_148 and answer the following question:

Drummer Gavin Harrison joined The Pineapple Thief in 2017. Which of these bands hasn't he played with?

a) The Tangent

b) Iamthemorning

c) Arena

For more information see www.pineapplethief.com

TERMS AND CONDITIONS: This competition will be open from March 8-April 12, 2024. By entering you agree to our competition rules (available at www.futureplc.com/competition-rules). Entries limited to one per household regardless of the form of entry. Use of automated devices as methods of submission are not valid forms of entry. The winner will be selected at random from all correct entries received by the closing date. No employees of Future Publishing or any of its group companies or the employees of any entity which has been involved with the administration of this competition or any member of their households may enter this competition. All prize details are correct at time of press, *Prog* magazine reserves the right to offer an alternative, if necessary. The winner will be notified by Future by email after the closing date. If a winner has not responded after 28 days, an alternative winner will be drawn.

Now our turn...

The Editor
Jerry Ewing

KYROS

Mannequin
WHITE STAR

The Art Guy
Russell Fairbrother

ELEPHANT9

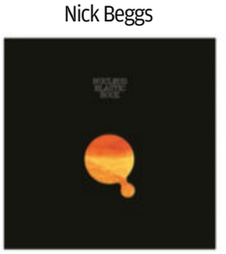
Mythical River
RUNE GRAMMOFON

The Deputy Ed
Natasha Scharf

CHELSEA WOLFE

She Reaches Out To She Reaches Out To She
LOMA VISTA

The Musician
Nick Beggs



NUCLEUS

Elastic Rock
VERTIGO

The Writer
Rich Hobson

OPETH

Damnation
MUSIC FOR NATIONS

The Reader
Randy Evans

DAVE KERZNER

Heart Land Mines Vol. 1
SONICELEMENTS.BANDCAMP.COM

AVIATIONS

Boston sextet create progressive metal for the head and the heart.

FORMED WHILE THE core of the band was studying at Berklee College Of Music in Boston, MA, Aviations have been diligent in not letting their theoretical knowledge hinder their ability to write genuinely heartfelt music.

"There's music that's for your heart and music that's for your head, and I think music that has a really good staying power finds a balance of both," explains pianist Richard Blumenthal. "Music can seem soulless when it's just a technical exercise, whereas music that's only for the heart might be a little too simplistic; you don't need to go back to it dozens of times. I'm probably a little bit more of a cerebral person, but other folks in the band are trying to make sure our music hits you in the heart. That balance is important."

Guitarists Sam Harchik and Eric Palmer, vocalist Adam Benjamin and drummer James Knoerl pieced together their debut album, *The Light Years*, during their studies. It was only when Blumenthal (whom Knoerl spotted posting covers of Armenian jazz pianist Tigran Hamasyan on YouTube) and bassist Werner Erkelens joined, that they felt like a cohesive unit.

"One of our strengths is that we're really good at having a diverse set of influences," says Knoerl. "We have very eclectic tastes between the six of us and we're able to work it so it doesn't sound like it's shoehorned together."

Building on the foundation that their stable and wide-ranging tastes afforded them, they've come to life on current album, *Luminaria*. From hook-driven pop to death metal, post-hardcore and classical, they've found a way of making their smörgåsbord of styles easily digestible.

"There was a lot of trial and error with this album in terms of trying to find an identity," Knoerl extends. "We've learnt what we like about our music and found ways to refine it to make that more clear."

"Now we have more confidence in our line-up and in our sound, we can now throw more stuff against the wall, be that death metal screams or cutesy music-box bridge sections that you get across *Luminaria*," Blumenthal returns.

He adds that the band's penchant for long songs — the record's closing one-two are 10 minutes apiece — has developed through each member being equal contributors.

"The more instruments you have the more textural possibilities and variants you have in your palette, so that naturally lets things expand. I think having six people means that the songs aren't going to get wrapped up in three minutes."

"All six of us have such different things that we excel at in writing," adds Knoerl. "We can all feel where a song is going and know who is best to work with to get it finished. It's a corny answer, but when I listen to the two albums, I think about how much we've matured as artists. There'll still be a lot of experimentation going forward, but now we have a clear blueprint; we know what sounds good for us individually and for the band." **POW**

PROG FILE

LINE-UP

Adam Benjamin *(vocals)*, **Sam Harchik** *(guitars)*, **Eric Palmer** *(guitars)*, **James Knoerl** *(drums)*, **Werner Erkelens** *(bass)*, **Richard Blumenthal** *(piano)*

SOUNDS LIKE

The techy prog metal of Dream Theater and Arch Echo mixed with sweeping, emotion-draped emo and alt rock vocals

CURRENT RELEASE

Luminaria is out now via The AV Collective

WEBSITE

aviationsband.com

PROG PRESENTS NEW MUSIC
Listen to AVIATIONS all this month on PROGZILLA RADIO
progzilla.com/listen/

"Having six people means the songs aren't going to get wrapped up in three minutes."

The more confident Aviations. L-R: Adam Benjamin, Richard Blumenthal, Eric Palmer, Sam Harchik, Werner Erkelens, James Knoerl.

PRESS/BRIAN KRAHE

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26|2|25	BRISTOL	BEACON
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1|3|25	CAMBRIDGE	CORN EXCHANGE
2|3|25	NOTTINGHAM	ROCK CITY
5|3|25	LIVERPOOL	PHILHARMONIC
6|3|25	NEWCASTLE	02 CITY HALL
7|3|25	ABERDEEN	MUSIC HALL
9|3|25	GLASGOW	02 ACADEMY

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NOSPŪN

US prog metallers look to the past and future in style.

"WE WANT TO make this a lifestyle," Nospūn vocalist Phillip Rich says. "We want to spend our time writing music like this, and sharing it with the world. We'd like to go wherever this music is willing to take us."

Judging by *Opus*, there's every chance that Nospūn will end up as globetrotters. Leaning heavily on influences from Dream Theater, Haken and Symphony X, but pushing them one step forward, the US quartet's conceptual debut will strike a chord with many — and with a massive, polished sound that impressively happens to be self-engineered, combined with some serious chops, it's quite the feat. It took them seven years to make, which can be attributed to a desire to get things spot on, and some life events, too.

"We knew something was different this time, that we had really done something special," Rich adds. "And we're already working on the next piece. I think the only thing slowing us down on that front is, we were never really expecting this album to take us some of the places it's starting to take us."

Victims of their own success, then. Nospūn were somewhat taken aback by the level of interest shown in *Opus*, leading to the group "playing catch-up" with physical products and merchandise. But the North Carolina band aren't a bolt from the blue, as their members previously played together under different monikers. It's only through Nospūn, however, that they've really started going places.

"We were utterly dumbfounded when everything started taking off," Rich says. "It's a wild animal we've stumbled into. It's crazy, and things are both exciting and a little scary."

It's hard to believe much of the album was captured in living rooms, and that's thanks to bassist Cole Millward, who recorded, mixed and mastered it himself. The group are now planning to tour, and rehearsals are already underway for their confirmed slot at ProgPower USA in September .

"It's not like we're new to a stage or anything like that... we just haven't played this music onstage yet, and it's a little bit next level," says Millward. "We want to put in the rehearsal time to make sure we're doing the album justice when we play it live."

The concept behind *Opus*, meanwhile, has echoes of Dream Theater's *Scenes From A Memory*, but chucks on extra layers of trippiness.

"It follows a protagonist who, himself, is a composer," Millward says, "and mostly what dominates his life is that he hears in his mind his perfect piece of music that he wants to write. He suffers from a form of writer's block that every time he attempts to play it on an instrument or write it down, it just leaves him."

Chuck in some strange deaths, and a machine that brings the composer in touch with an older version of himself, and you've got one of the proggiest concepts of the year. If they continue at this rate, it looks like Nospūn will be travelling far. **CC**

PROG FILE

LINE-UP
Phillip Rich *(vocals)*, **James Nelson** *(guitar)*, **Cole Millward** *(bass)*, **Paul Wood** *(drums)*

SOUNDS LIKE
Post-2000 Dream Theater getting their party on with Haken

CURRENT RELEASE
Opus is out now

WEBSITE
nospun.bandcamp.com

"We knew we had really done something special."

In a spin! L-R: James Nelson, Phillip Rich, Paul Wood, Cole Millward.

PRESS/MAQ BROWN

Q&A

PER WIBERG

Playing guitar, keyboards, organ, and a bass (or two), not to mention singing and producing his own albums, the multitalented Swede is in particularly adventurous form with his third solo release.

Words: David West **Portrait:** Soile Siirtola

"I'm a big music nerd," says Per Wiberg. The Swedish multi-instrumentalist has done everything from prog to death metal, stoner to heavy blues with artists from Opeth and Arch Enemy to Kamchatka and Spiritual Beggars. With his third solo release, *The Serpent's Here*, Wiberg gives vent to his progressive impulses, throwing in everything from two basses to freaky jazz breakdowns.

"I would like to think it's an ongoing process," he says about his developing sound. "You start out listening to music and playing music when you're a kid, and then you build from there. The backpack gets bigger and bigger every year."

What's changed in your creative process since your solo debut, 2019's *Head Without Eyes*?
On the first two solo releases, I recorded everything on my own and added drums last. The big difference this time was that we recorded it live in the studio as a band. I only gave Tor [Sjödén], the drummer, and Mikael [Tuominen], the bass player, rough sketches of the songs. I wanted to keep it loose so we all could improvise, then I added keyboards and guitars afterwards. I wanted the recording session to dictate where it would go instead of having all the ideas down before going into the studio. That made it a little more adventurous. When we recorded, both me and Mikael played bass, so no other instruments, just drums and two basses in the studio.

What inspired that approach?
When you play keyboards or guitar, then you're always going to listen to the chords and melodies, but if you only have two basses playing with the drummer, you interact in a different way because there are no melodies or chords to think about. I would like to think that you play more freely. It's obviously a very different type of music but if you listen to some of the old jazz players like Ornette Coleman, when they did a three-piece without piano, they play differently compared to when you have chord progressions. I wanted to try that and see what came out of it.

"If you only have two basses playing with the drummer, you interact in a different way."

What did two basses mean for mixing?
Jonas Kjellgren, who mixed the album, asked, "Why?" When you listen to the album, I don't think people will go, "Oh, it's two basses!" Instead of layering guitars and guitars on top of each other, I wanted to use at least one of the basses in a different way, more distorted. You pan the two basses left and right instead of the normal way where you'd have it upfront.

In the title track, there's a squonky breakdown that seems more inspired by jazz than rock...
I listen to a lot of jazz, a lot of freeform and noise stuff. I thought that part of the song felt way more fun and interesting than just having a regular solo. It was a lot more fun for us as musicians to just go for it instead of planning a chord progression. It gives it a little bit more of an edge, since the rest of the song is pretty straightforward, so there is an element of surprise, which I think is interesting.

You performed with Clutch again last summer. They look like a fun band to play with!
They are. They're really good friends. I've guested with them on and off for 20 years. Depending on where they are in the world, they'll give me a call. If I'm free I always do it because it's such a delight. It's so much fun and an honour that someone would get a Swede out on the road. They play a different setlist every night. We looked at it this summer when I was out with them and I think I've played almost 70 songs with them, so I've got a fairly good grip on the Clutch catalogue.

Was there anything you learned from your time in Opeth that you bring to your solo projects?
I would like to think I've learned from everything; at least that's what I hope. That's one of the cool things about playing music. Mikael [Åkerfeldt, frontman] in Opeth is very good at arranging, he's got a very good ear. There's a lot of stuff going on in Opeth's songs, but he always makes it easy on the ears. That was a very good lesson. Every time I play with a band or project or new people, I try to find the essence of what it is I'm going to do, where the music comes from and the ambitions of the people who wrote it, so you're in the right place stylistically when you start to play. If you try to find out where they're coming from musically, you'll learn something new.

How does being a frontman and solo artist differ from being a sideman?
It's a different experience because you have different roles in the band. It depends a little bit on what instrument you play and so on. Most of the time when I've been a frontman, I play an instrument as well. You can't run around too much if that is your ambition. When I played bass with Kamchatka, me and Thomas [Andersson], the guitar player, would sing different songs, so you could say that we were both frontmen, but you still play an instrument and sing at the same time, so you're pretty much in the same spot for the whole gig.

When I was younger, I was more nervous about singing lead and playing, it was a bigger deal. It's not something that I think about so much these days. It's different if you have an ambition to be an entertainer, you have those bands with amazing frontmen that can make a whole arena sing, they have the whole arena in their hands. I've never thought about playing music like that. I just want to play my music and it doesn't matter if it's a small club with five people or a big venue, I would hope that people would enjoy it because that's the only thing I can do, to keep it plain and simple and honest. I couldn't do the Dee Snider [Twisted Sister] schtick between songs and be believable. It works well for him, but it wouldn't for me. I'll play and sing my music and have my fingers crossed that people will think that's enough.

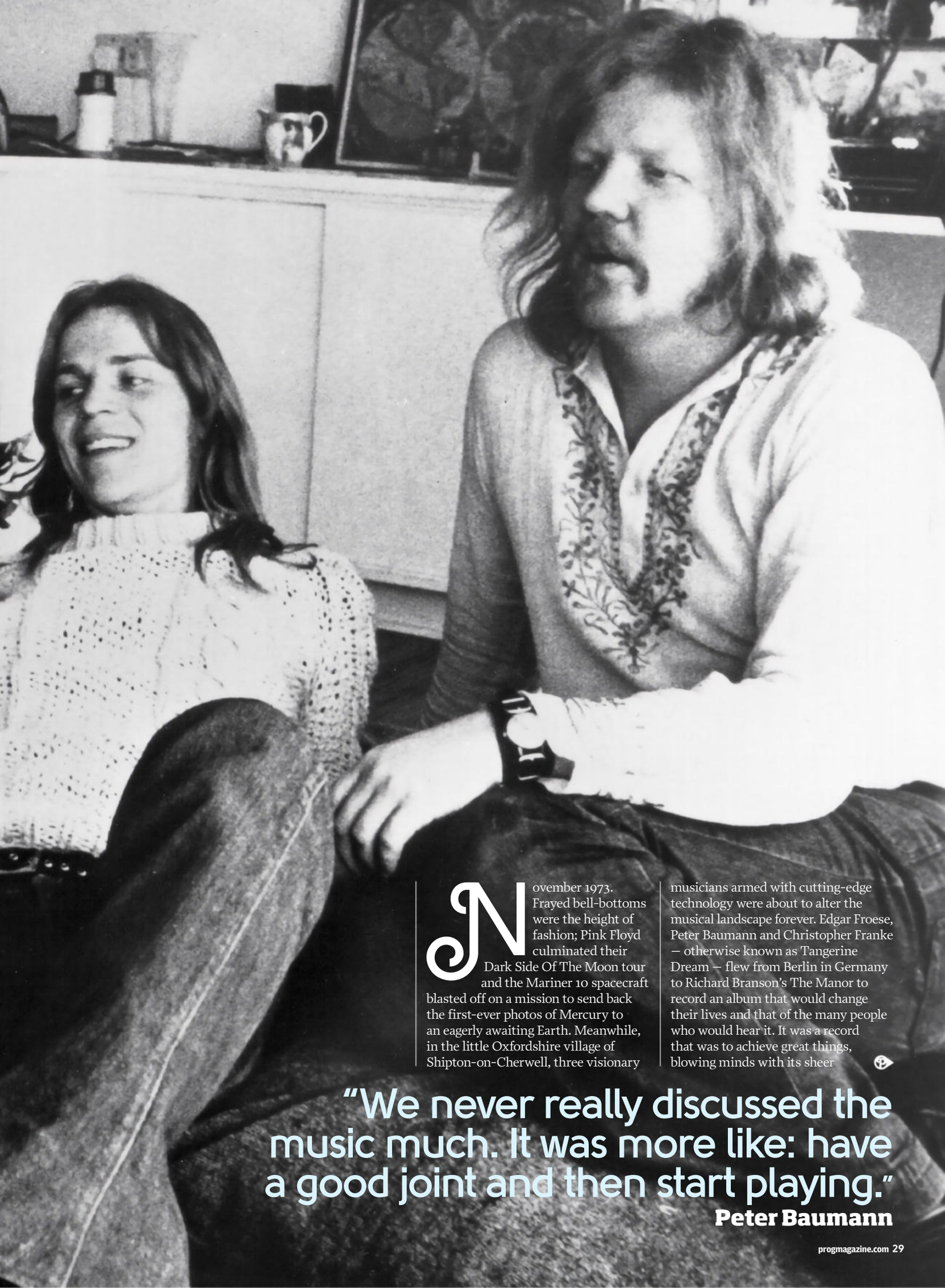
The Serpent's Here is out on March 15 via Despotz Records. See perwibergmusic.com for more information.

Christopher Franke, Peter Baumann and Edgar Froese, circa 1973.

Movements of Visionaries

Fifty years ago, electronic music got a new beat when **Tangerine Dream** released *Phaedra*. The pioneering German group's fifth studio album saw the Berliners relocate to the English countryside, and its motorik grooves played a key role in what was being defined as krautrock. We look back on the story behind one of the greatest experimental electronic albums of all time, its legacy and the synthesiser that informed its sound.

Words: Chris Wheatley **Image:** Michael Ochs Archives/Getty Images



November 1973. Frayed bell-bottoms were the height of fashion; Pink Floyd culminated their Dark Side Of The Moon tour and the Mariner 10 spacecraft blasted off on a mission to send back the first-ever photos of Mercury to an eagerly awaiting Earth. Meanwhile, in the little Oxfordshire village of Shipton-on-Cherwell, three visionary musicians armed with cutting-edge technology were about to alter the musical landscape forever. Edgar Froese, Peter Baumann and Christopher Franke — otherwise known as Tangerine Dream — flew from Berlin in Germany to Richard Branson's The Manor to record an album that would change their lives and that of the many people who would hear it. It was a record that was to achieve great things, blowing minds with its sheer

"We never really discussed the music much. It was more like: have a good joint and then start playing."
Peter Baumann

invention and inspiring decades of electronic music.

For Branson, it was a propitious time. Virgin Records was in the second year of its existence and riding high on the phenomenal success of Mike Oldfield's *Tubular Bells*. The label's mail order service was in full swing, providing fans in England with advance access to the cream of American imports. Never one to rest on his laurels, the entrepreneur had travelled in person to Germany to recruit his latest act. By the time they signed to Virgin, Tangerine Dream had already released four albums via German experimental label Ohr. They'd also undergone multiple changes in personnel, with founding member Edgar Froese the only constant. For their previous two long-players, however, *Zeit* (1972) and *Atem* (1973), they'd settled on what is now considered their classic line-up.

Froese was the group's creative powerhouse and polymath; an instinctive musician who'd also studied painting and sculpture at the Berlin Academy of Arts. On tour in Spain with his first band, The Ones, Froese had performed a special concert for the surrealist painter Salvador Dalí. It was a meeting that infused him with a passion for experimentation. Returning to Germany, he formed Tangerine Dream in 1967 with a long-since forgotten line-up of Lanse Hapshash (drums), Kurt Herkenberg (bass), Volker Hombach (sax, violin, flute) and Charlie Prince on vocals. By the time Christopher Franke joined in 1971, after a stint as drummer for The Agitation — later renamed Agitation Free — Steve Jolliffe, Klaus Schulze and Conrad Schnitzler had all passed through the band's ranks.

Peter Baumann also came on board that year, at the crucial point when the band were shifting from guitars to electronics. For Baumann, a career in music was never planned.

"Oh, no, not at all," he admits. "Everything that happens in my life is an accident. And it was a very simple story: I had a buddy in school, and we were just chatting. He said, 'I'm playing in a band, why don't you come along and listen?' So I went. They had a bass player, guitar player, vocalist and drummer, but no keyboard. So I said, 'Why don't I go on keyboards and join you?' And that was it."

Primarily a covers band, this was a good experience for Baumann, but not fulfilling. It was another accident of fate, a chance meeting, that initially led to his involvement with Tangerine Dream.

"I was at a concert — Emerson, Lake & Palmer," he recalls. "They started late, so I began to talk to the folks behind me. There was a guy with long, dark hair named Christopher. We were

MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES

Tangerine Dream performing at Coventry Cathedral, Warwickshire, October 4, 1975.

"Tangerine Dream was not about personalities. None of us was a star or a special person. It was always the music that was front and centre"

Peter Baumann

Founding member Edgar Froese, the only constant in the band, pictured in 1973.

chatting about what we were doing. He said he played in a band. I said, 'I do some experiments with music as well.'"

Bonding over a shared love of instrumental records, the two exchanged details and, a week later, Baumann received a note from Franke urging him to get in touch as they were looking for a new keyboard player.

"So I called up," recalls Baumann, "and about a week later, they invited me to bring my keyboard and meet them at a rehearsal room. The rest is history."

Over their following two albums, *Zeit* and *Atem*, Tangerine Dream set about exploring new sounds.

"The music was evolving, intuitively," says Baumann. "You're always trying new things and you say, 'Hey, that seems to work', but we never really discussed the music much. It was more like: have a good joint and then start playing."

With *Phaedra*, however, that changed.

"The major difference was that it was the first record where we had a Moog synthesiser," remembers Baumann. "That was very unique at the time, and it really set the flavour for the main piece."

The synthesiser in question came to the group via an unusual path. Sometime in 1969, The Rolling Stones had purchased a complete modular system from Moog, one of the very first commercially available. The Stones' experiments with the nascent technology ultimately led nowhere. Dissatisfied, they sold their equipment to the Hansa Studio in Berlin, an establishment that would later become famous through its use by David Bowie, Iggy Pop and others. Back in 1973, Hansa accepted an offer for the Stones' old Moog from Tangerine Dream's Christopher Franke. A bargain at only $15,000 — an equivalent of about £90,000 in today's money.

Franke paid for the Moog using the band's advance from Virgin. Baumann recalls how the group's contract with Branson's company came about.

"He [Branson] was looking for bands. And I think it was Simon Draper [Virgin Records co-founder] who told him there were a few bands in Germany — Faust, Can and Tangerine Dream — that he should check out. So he came to Berlin. We got along famously, and he made us an offer."

Fast-forward to November, 1973 when the group decamped to Oxfordshire and set up home in The Manor.

"We recorded pretty well in Germany," says Baumann, "but The Manor studio was a whole different ball game. We had a really nice 16-track machine and really good outboard gear. It was a beautiful facility. For three weeks we got in there and recorded *Phaedra*."

It was a record that grew organically.

"We never had any clear idea of what we were going to do," stresses Baumann. "There was one commonality — that is we would start very, very simply and see what happened. Even in live concerts we started from one note and then developed from that one note. That was the only thing that we ever discussed."

Tangerine Dream's influences at the time came largely from fellow sonic experimenters.

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A Force Of Nature

Bianca Froese-Acquaye discusses her late husband, Edgar Froese.

"*Phaedra* is of the greatest importance," says Edgar Froese's widow, Bianca Froese-Acquaye. "It was a groundbreaking album in every respect: it opened up a completely new sound experience for the listeners, broke old listening habits, heralded a new musical genre and opened the door to a world career."

The artist, author and painter, who was married to Tangerine Dream's founder for 13 years until his death in 2015, and now manages the current incarnation of the band, also co-authored Edgar's comprehensive 2017 autobiography, *Force Majeure*. She isn't surprised that *Phaedra*'s popularity has endured for so long.

It marked, she says, "a listening experience of the extraterrestrial kind. And even today, the music with its sequences, rhythms and melodies sounds so incredibly unique and timeless that it is almost impossible to escape its fascination. This music catapults you into other worlds... dreamlike!"

Bianca had ample opportunity to observe Edgar's creative process.

"Edgar had two ways of approaching music," she explains. "Either he gave himself a theme from which he drew mental and emotional inspiration for his music, or he approached a piece of music completely intuitively and let himself drift. It was a natural, organic process.

"He often told me he felt a kind of flow, that the compositional ideas flowed through him. It is probably what we would call talent, a gift."

For Edgar, *Phaedra* always occupied a special place.

"He was well aware that it was a groundbreaking album for Tangerine Dream," says Bianca.

Bianca and Edgar were married for 13 years.

The challenging conditions under which it was created and the inspiration arising from the new technology led to, she says, "the fire Edgar caught when he heard the corresponding sequences from the Moog."

In 2004, on the album's 35th anniversary, Edgar embarked on a project to re-record it. It was released the following year.

"It's not about improvement," Bianca stresses, "but simply about the aspect of doing things differently. Edgar was keen to see what it would sound like with new digital technology. *Phaedra 2005* was given a new dynamic and, from my point of view, a new playful lightness."

The reimagined music was given its live première at London's Shepherd's Bush Empire that June, with a suitably artistic twist.

"The three musicians [Edgar, son Jerome and, for the first time, Thorsten Quaeschning] sat on stage with their backs to the audience," remembers Bianca, "behind a gauze curtain, a so-called kabuki drop, which suddenly fell onto the stage and the sequencers kicked in – it was an impressive event, a reminiscence of the early years."

The concert served as a fitting testament and came out on DVD in 2007.

"*Phaedra* was the starting point for the creation of a new musical genre: electronic popular music," says Bianca, "it inspired many other musicians and those who wanted to become musicians to experiment with synthesisers and Moogs. *Phaedra* was a global trigger that ushered in a new musical era." **CW**

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"We listened to Pink Floyd's *Ummagumma* and then *The Dark Side Of The Moon*. The instrumental sections, they were our favourites."

Peter Baumann

Phaedra's Beating Heart

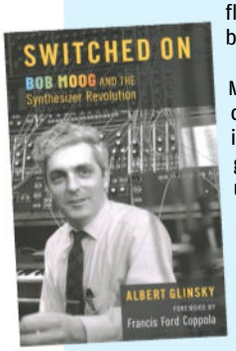
Albert Glinsky on the Moog and the challenges it posed Tangerine Dream on *Phaedra*.

"The Moog synthesiser created a revolution," says Albert Glinsky, whose book, *Switched On: Bob Moog And The Synthesizer Revolution*, stands as the definitive work on New York City native Robert Arthur Moog (1934–2005). It was Moog's pioneering music technology that made *Phaedra* possible.

"Previously, the only people who could make electronic music were those with some engineering background, able to manipulate complex gear in radio stations or in university labs," Glinsky explains. "The Moog allowed musicians to hear the results of the new sounds they were creating in real time, playing them from a keyboard."

Bob Moog's first prototype was created in 1964 as a one-off experiment for his friend, the electronic composer Herb Deutsch.

"Bob started getting requests from musicians for copies of the prototype, some with added features," says Glinsky. "Little by little word got out, and by 1967 Bob found himself running a fully fledged business.



"The Moog was completely intuitive and generally user-friendly," he adds, "There were no other systems when it was introduced so it was the first real synthesiser considered to be a musical instrument. The fact that it used a standard black and white keyboard made it instantly appealing to musicians."

Despite its obvious capabilities, the Moog's limitations, especially when compared to modern machines, reveal the amount of effort and ingenuity that Tangerine Dream poured into *Phaedra* to be all the more astonishing. Many of the features of the early Moogs have since become standard and are still found on modern synthesisers today. Back in 1974, however, Froese, Franke and Baumann faced challenges unknown to contemporary musicians.

"With the early analogue Moog," explains Glinsky, "a nest of patch cords connecting inputs and outputs was necessary even to get a sound. And when you got sounds almost accidentally, it was nearly impossible to recreate those sounds again – everything was subject to the vagaries of voltage fluctuations and remembering the exact configurations in the jungle of wires you'd plugged in."

With no presets and no memory, each morning the band had to start over from scratch.

"Modern musicians," Glinsky observes, "have become so used to the ease of audio workstations that they'd find using a Moog synth in its early incarnations like being a digital graphic artist asked to create with oil paints on canvas."

They might get there in the end, says Glinsky, but "they would have no shortcuts, keystrokes, macros, and templates. And certainly no AI virtual wizards to turn to. The results were usually fascinating, but pretty spontaneous and unexpected. And everything had to be recorded on magnetic tape and played back – no instant replay with instant corrections."

Phaedra, then, is the sound of spontaneous creation through a process unique to its space time coordinates. **CW**

COURTESY OF ALBERT GLINSKY

"You listen to it now and you think, 'How did this record sell millions and millions of copies?' because it's very strange."

Steven Wilson

"We listened to a lot of instrumental music," recalls Baumann. "Stockhausen and Ligeti — a lot of classical composers who did very experimental things."

Born in 1928, German composer Karlheinz Stockhausen was an early innovator in electronic music. Nearly 20 years before *Phaedra* was realised, his pioneering *Gesang Der Jünglinge* had mixed human voices with electronically generated pulses, tones and white noise. Around the same time, Transylvania-born György Ligeti had begun utilising micropolyphony — dense lines of sound moving at varying tempos and rhythms.

"From the popular bands," says Baumann, "we listened to Pink Floyd's *Ummagumma* and then *The Dark Side Of The Moon*. The instrumental sections — they were our favourites."

The genius of Froese, Baumann and Franke, based largely on instinct, lay in combining these disparate elements into a wholly original model. Even during recording, they had no idea how *Phaedra* would sound in its final form.

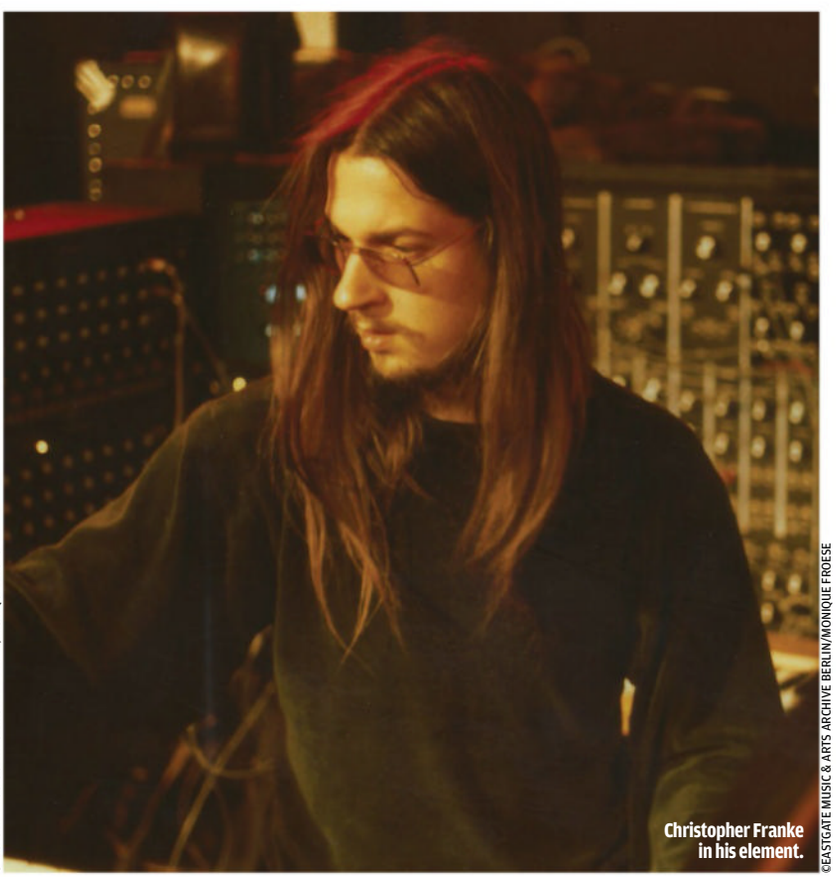
"We recorded quite a bit," explains Baumann, "and a lot of it was junk that we threw out. But obviously [the title track] worked very well, and so we refined it a little bit in the studio. It's not a live situation, so in the studio we could do some overdubs."

It was a process of going back and forth between the three.

"We never discussed the music; we'd just say, 'I like it', or 'I don't like that.' So, you know, it was a collaboration on many different levels, and it was extremely intuitive. There was, especially with *Phaedra*, never any fighting or disagreements or anything like that. It was really a very instinctual and homogeneous collaboration."

According to Baumann, the novel environment they found themselves recording in helped to shape the music.

"In hindsight, it was a much better atmosphere. We enjoyed being in



Christopher Franke in his element.

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Christopher Franke, Edgar Froese and Peter Baumann at the Zeiss Grand Planetarium, Berlin.

Wired for sound: Peter Baumann in 1975.

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the country; The Manor was a great facility and we loved being there. And we'd never before worked three weeks in a row. Although I was, at the time, 19 or 20 years old. I wasn't paying much attention to the bigger picture."

Even when things were going well, the band had no sense that the *Phaedra* project would amount to their largest success to date.

"We just knew that we liked it," says Baumann. "I mean, there was really no comparison. It was so unique. Nobody else was doing anything like that. We just enjoyed it. And we thought it was cool. Very cool."

The lengthy sessions were not without their challenges. Speaking in an interview for Mark Prendergast's comprehensive study of electronic music, *The Ambient Century* (2000), Edgar Froese confirmed:

"There's hours and hours of unreleased material."

Steven Wilson on the challenges of remixing a 70s synth classic.

He's the remixer du jour and spacial audio specialist of choice for left-field artists, but even Steven Wilson found it a challenge to remix *Phaedra*. In 2018, the No-Man and Porcupine Tree leader was invited to revisit the album using the original master tapes and, as he tells us, it was a very rewarding process.

PRESS

How did your involvement in remixing *Phaedra* come about?

The guy who was curating for the Tangerine Dream box set [2019's *In Search Of Hades*] is a lovely chap called Mark Powell. He knew I was a big fan and asked me. He said: "We've got some multitrack tapes for *Phaedra*." Actually, they didn't have it all, they only had side one, but they also found some other tapes that had never been mixed from the *Phaedra* sessions. So it was a really interesting project, presenting the music for the first time in surround sound with spatial audio. For me, that era of Tangerine Dream being one of the most important influences on my life, it was a no-brainer. It was fascinating, an education, and an honour to do.

It must have been a rather daunting task?

My approach is essentially to be as incredibly faithful to the original mix, almost to the point where some people couldn't tell the difference. If someone says they can't tell the difference, to me, that's a compliment, because I don't want it to immediately jump out as something revisionist. A lot of the process is matching the original mix decisions, matching the original reverbs, stereo placement, level changes and treatments. It's particularly difficult with an album like *Phaedra*, where the sounds are already quite abstract and quite difficult to recognise. It's like, what is that?! I don't even know that instrument: it's probably some Fender Rhodes put through an echo unit. It's hard sometimes to understand what you're listening to, but I found it challenging and rewarding to figure those things out.

Was there a lot of previously unreleased material?

There are hours and hours of it. Every day they went into the studio and set the tape rolling. They recorded a couple of hours of music every day for about two weeks and a lot of it really isn't working. And that's fascinating to me, because this comes back to this whole idea of capturing lightning in a bottle. The musicians almost don't understand themselves quite what is making something work. I think what Tangerine Dream were particularly good at was curating their own improvisations, because, as I say, there are hours and hours of music. I think their ability to recognise that something magical had happened was one of their really strong points.

Were you left with a deeper appreciation of the music?

I did come out with more of an appreciation in the sense that I began to understand a little bit about the magic involved in creating *Phaedra*. Sometimes that's something even the artists can't explain. There's a lot of serendipity. I understand as much as possible how something like *Phaedra* was made because, again, I don't think the artist would be able to explain to you, and I can't explain to you, what makes that record magical, but it is magical. I spent three weeks of my life deconstructing, reconstructing, breaking it down and rebuilding it. But that doesn't mean I like it any less than I did before. If anything, I like it even more now.

How would you sum up *Phaedra*'s importance?

There's something intangible about what it is and the way it was created. I think there's something very unknowable about it. You listen to it now and you think, "How did this record sell millions and millions of copies?" Because it's very strange. I think maybe it's just down to the musical climate at that time: people were genuinely curious and there wasn't the proliferation of music that we live with now. And so a record like that, which was quite avant-garde and quite experimental, could get a little bit of attention. *Phaedra* has a kind of sense of being on the edge and slightly out of control, that the technology is almost controlling the musicians. There's a beautiful symbiotic thing going on and they're trying to harness this technology that isn't easy to control. Nowadays, a record like that would just get lost in it in the daily shuffle. They were very exciting times, when music like that could reach a mainstream audience. Sadly, that's no longer the case. **CW**

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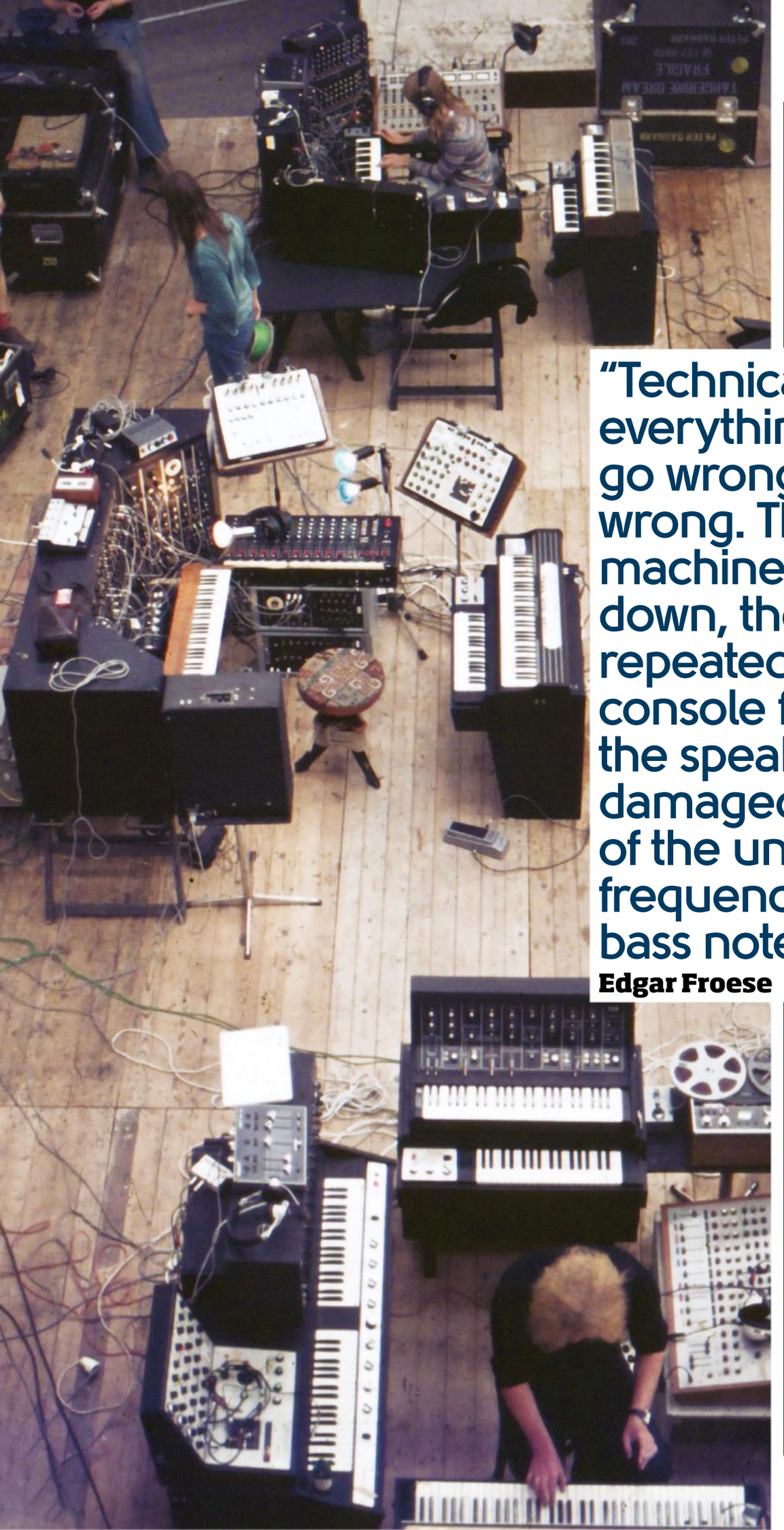
Wizards at work: Tangerine Dream in Manchester, 1974.



"Technically, everything that could go wrong did go wrong. The tape machine broke down, there were repeated mixing console failures, and the speakers were damaged because of the unusually low frequencies of the bass notes."

Frequent power cuts added to the band's woes. A miners' strike was in full swing and commercial users of electricity were prohibited at certain times. To further complicate matters, incessant rain found its way in through the roof of the old building, leading to a mass scramble to protect precious instruments and equipment by binding it in plastic sheeting. A particular low point occurred when Froese witnessed the Manor's resident Irish wolfhound amble in, raise its leg, and urinate against the band's Mellotron.

Despite these travails, staff at The Manor did their best to maintain a good atmosphere, and gradually *Phaedra* took shape. The band worked long days, beginning mid-morning and toiling on into the small hours. With no presets or writeable memory, setting up the Moog alone proved to be time-intensive. The results, though, were worth it. The synthesiser's driving arpeggiated bass line provided a stunning bedrock for the group to build on, using Mellotron, guitars and electric piano to construct a hypnotic, layered soundscape. A quirk of the new equipment was its extreme sensitivity to heat: when the Moog warmed up, it also went out of tune.

"Technically, everything that could go wrong did go wrong. The tape machine broke down, there were repeated mixing console failures, and the speakers were damaged because of the unusually low frequencies of the bass notes."

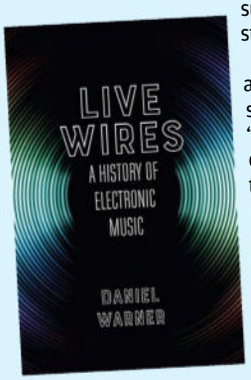
Edgar Froese

A Milestone In Electronic Music

Daniel Warner details *Phaedra*'s ongoing appeal.

Composer and author Daniel Warner encountered *Phaedra* in the year of its release and was immediately struck by its unique sound. A Professor emeritus at Hampshire College, MA, he earned a PhD studying computer music at Princeton University under the great Milton Babbitt. Warner's book *Live Wires: A History Of Electronic Music* charts the development of the genre from its earliest days to the modern scene. He is in no doubt as to *Phaedra*'s influence.

"I think it's actually hugely important," he says. "I disagree with a lot of people who think that it was *Autobahn* [Kraftwerk] that influenced a lot of beat-orientated electronic music. Now obviously it did, but *Phaedra* pre-dates that, and the sound of it is more like what you would hear listening to dark Berlin techno years later, and certainly Detroit techno. It's a really monumental record, and without the need for a traditional drummer."



Tangerine Dream found themselves at the perfect point to make use of emerging technology.

"One of the things that benefitted them," Warner explains, "was the model IIIc – a large set of Moog modules in a wooden cabinet. The IIIc had 10 oscillators and four or five envelope generators and voltage-controlled amplifiers. There was a spring reverb, a pitch shifter and a ring modulator, which was really good for producing bell-like sounds. When you played a note on the keyboard it turned on a little amplifier that followed a particular time shape."

Another key piece of kit was the Moog 960 sequencer.

"It would go from eight to 16 to 24 steps and the repeat," says Warner, "and that's how, on *Phaedra*, they got those wonderful driving bass lines and those futuristic riffs."

But the nascent technology wasn't without its problems.

"It must have been very difficult for them," Warner reflects."They had a lot of technical issues at The Manor. Those early Moogs had a fair amount of drift on the oscillators. If you had them on for three or four hours the circuits would stabilise a bit. So you have your sequence or riff and you're laying stuff on it, sometimes playing countermelodies – it must have been a challenge."

It's even more remarkable that, despite numerous hurdles, *Phaedra* stands as such an impressive statement.

"I see it as a real milestone," says Warner, "in terms of compositional technique and compositional style. I think one of the reasons it continues to resonate is that it's basically continuous music. It doesn't have a traditional structure and, maybe because of that, it's something that invites people to listen more deeply. It's really interesting that when it was released, it wasn't just people like me, composers or jazz musicians, a lot of people really got it."

Tangerine Dream's breakthrough album opened a door for these fans explore to a host of innovative German acts, music that comprised what was starting to be termed 'krautrock'. "It was sonically a foundation for something that had a wonderful motorik groove," agrees Warner, "it was unlike anything that had come before because of this sequential, repetitive sound." **CW**

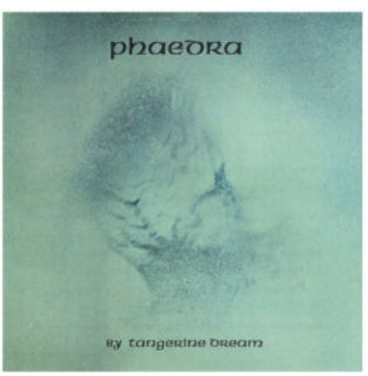
COURTESY OF DANIEL WERNER

"It had such a feeling of mystery. The allure of it was just fascinating. There's an expansiveness that affects your consciousness."

Steve Roach

The trio used this to their advantage, letting the Moog have its way and incorporating the results into the title track.

The finished album was released in the UK on the February, 20 1974 and, to the average listener, *Phaedra* must have sounded like a broadcast from an alien planet. The title track alone proved a revelation. Occupying the entirety of side one, *Phaedra* itself builds from an uneasy synth bubbling, gradually coalescing into a hypnotic, polyrhythmic entity, shifting like a kaleidoscope through multicoloured clouds of Mellotron tones. The three tracks comprising side two, *Mysterious Semblence At The Strand Of Nightmares*, *Movements Of A Visionary* and *Sequent 'C'* form something of space rock symphony, taking the listener on a beguiling journey to strange, distant galaxies. *Phaedra* provided music that seeped into the soul. Nothing quite like it had invaded the UK's airwaves and bedrooms before.



***Phaedra*: its importance cannot be overstated.**

Not surprisingly, some responses from critics were openly hostile, including an infamous diatribe from *Melody Maker*'s Steve Lake, who described the record as "gutless and spineless, devoid of inspiration" Despite such vitriol and spurred on by exposure from far-sighted radio DJs such as John Peel, *Phaedra* gradually grew into something of a phenomenon. In a wonderful bit of poetic justice, it broke *Melody Maker*'s own Top 10. Baumann was as surprised as anyone by the record's success.

"It was very funny – a week or two after it came out, I was in Italy with a girlfriend and I got a telegram from Richard [Branson] saying, 'You have to come to London, your record is in the Top 10.' I thought, what is he talking about? I had no idea, so I called him, and he said, 'No, no, Peter, it's in the *Melody Maker* Top 10.' And so I went to London to do a ton of interviews."

It was an astonishing feat for such a radical record.

"We were a totally experimental band," says Baumann. "We weren't rock, we weren't pop, and we played for relatively small audiences in Germany. We didn't even sell a lot of records in Germany. *Atem* and *Zeit* sold maybe a couple of thousands, maybe 10,000 – we never sold much in the beginning. So, I had no expectations. I was totally surprised and, you know, it was a life-changing event."

Phaedra hit No.15 on the UK album chart, proving the critics wrong and opening the floodgates to a surge of interest in the new music coming from across the English Channel. Kraftwerk's *Autobahn*, released in the UK a few months later, reached No.4 on the UK album charts and listeners soon sought out ambitious sounds from other radical German groups such as Faust, Can and Amon Düül II.

Phaedra's success propelled Tangerine Dream to a new level of celebrity.

"I think we took it pretty much in our stride," reflects Baumann. "The first time it hit me was when we did a couple of concerts after the album got successful: the first was in London [at Victoria Palace Theatre on June 16, 1974]. There were thousands of people there and that was kind of stunning. It just hit me: oh my God, there are actually people liking it!"

It was the first time that the band encountered their UK fans face to face. They knew that *Phaedra* was selling well, but experiencing the adoration close up was a shock.

"In a live setting," says Baumann, "it's really a completely different ball game. And it really hits you that

thousands of people are spending their time and money to come to hear you. That was unique."

For him, the album was a personal turning point, one where he began to understand that a long-time career in music was possible.

"I didn't plan anything," he muses. "I just did what I enjoyed doing and they [Froese and Franke] seemed like a couple of cool people to travel with, hang out with, and make music with. And, you know, there was no way that I could have planned making a living off of it."

After *Phaedra*, though, music became a full-time job.

"You settle in," says Baumann, "and then you do the next record, and you do a tour here and a tour there. Then we went to America and did tons of interviews. It became a lifestyle."

The three young musicians adapted well, their natural level-headedness a solid anchor against the strains and excesses of the business.

"It wasn't that difficult," Baumann recalls. "You know, Tangerine Dream was not about personalities. None of us was a star or a special person. It was always the music that was front and centre. We had some groupies and stuff, but it was never as wild and crazy as with some of the rock bands."

Phaedra sits proud among the many fine entries in Tangerine Dream's extensive discography, and its influence has never dimmed.

"I think one of the reasons," says Baumann, "is that it was one of the first electronic records and it became kind of a landmark for a lot of other folks. The difference with *Phaedra* is that it's more like an interior experience rather than an exterior experience, where people jump up and down, screaming, at a rock concert. It has a very different atmosphere that lends itself very well for people to listen at home with headphones."

It's an album tied to the uniqueness of the time of its genesis. The newness of the technology and the set-up of the music business created perfect conditions for such an album to seep into the public consciousness.

"Yeah, it's a very different ball game now," Baumann reflects, "and also the distribution is very different. Everything is much more fast paced. If you would release a record like *Phaedra* today, it would not be noticed, or very little."

The ubiquitous access to music, he argues, has to some extent lessened its special aura.

"Back then there were no computers and music was a much more important part of people's lives than today."

In the 1970s, especially in Germany, experimentation within popular music was rife. Bands were moving away from the ubiquitous three-minute verse-chorus song with a traditional drums, guitar and bass set-up towards a more inward-looking sound.

"I think it's the German mentality, you know," Baumann reflects. "Over the years there have been very, very few real rock bands, you know. They had their pop music, but testosterone-driven rock music, that just was not a German thing. You had the Scorpions at the time, and maybe one or two other bands, but I think Germans, they live more in their heads than in their guts."

Phaedra is a landmark of such cerebral, transformative music and, half-a-century on, it continues to resonate. And Baumann continues to be surprised by its enduring popularity.

"Here we are 50 years later doing an interview. And yeah, I didn't think that it would last that long," he admits.

As with any long-lived band, Tangerine Dream have drifted in and out of prime focus but have never ceased to be relevant.

"There are phases when it's more noticeable," he agrees, "and then less — it goes through waves."

For Baumann, it's been a long journey with plenty of high points. "Playing the Royal Albert Hall [in April 1975] was obviously something you don't forget," he says. "Also Reims Cathedral [France, 1974] and New York City [on several occasions]."

Of playing live, he admits, "It's like sex. Sometimes it's the best thing in the world. And sometimes it's just something that you have to do. But it's always better doing it than not!"

And was *Phaedra* the album that started it all?

"I don't listen to it very often," he confesses, "but when I do, you know, it's really timeless. It was always in its own world; it didn't fit into any category."

Legions of fans would surely rush to agree.

Peter Baumann: Phase By Phase — The Virgin Albums is out on April 26 via Esoteric. See www.cherryred.co.uk for more information. For the latest about the current line-up of Tangerine Dream visit tangerinedreammusic.com.

Playing With The Band

Electronic artist Steve Roach discusses *Phaedra*'s ambient legacy.

A two-time Grammy Award nominee, composer Steve Roach is one of the most influential ambient artists working today. In 2023, he was personally invited to join the current line-up of Tangerine Dream onstage for two dates of their North American tour. He'd been a fan since the band's earliest days.

"As a young guy," he says, "I was already immersing myself in those long-form pieces that so many of us connected to in the 70s. It had such a feeling of mystery. The allure of it was just fascinating. There's an expansiveness that affects your consciousness. It was something you imbibed."

Roach cites *Phaedra* as a particular landmark.

"It's one of the pillars of electronic music. I think the fact that it was coming out when it did and it was coming in to the world through the channels that it did, it influenced a lot of people in a lot of different directions. Early Pink Floyd had elements of those sound worlds and those surreal soundscapes, but the way that things were formulated on *Phaedra*, it's so visceral and so visionary."

The album, says Roach, inspired a new way of thinking about composing.

"It empowered the new movement, the scene if you want to call it that, but it also especially lit up people like myself, who were craving this kind of art form that was beyond what you would think of as music at that time. It was the sound of the future happening."

Tangerine Dream with Steve Roach in San Diego, 2023.

©STEVE ROACH

With *Phaedra*, says Roach, Tangerine Dream tapped into something timeless.

"It has a flowing, fluid, kind of natural organic quality that doesn't have a time date," he muses. "The way they were recording and the way they treated the sounds, you had the sense that you were inside of some other dimension. It sounds like it had existed forever. There's a primal, driving feel to it. It actually sounds more impactful now, in a way."

It was chance meeting with Tangerine Dream's Christopher Franke in 1977 that encouraged Roach in his own burgeoning career.

"I was doing a concert in a small festival in California, in the Venice Beach area," Roach recalls. "It was a classic Sunday afternoon. You're three miles from the ocean and there was this beautiful courtyard. Somehow, Chris and his girlfriend showed up. And they're just in the audience. It was surreal, but he was just cool as hell."

Roach and Franke spent the next day talking gear and going over Roach's set-up. It was the beginning of a connection that would come full circle decades later, when Roach joined the current line-up onstage. For Roach, performing with Tangerine Dream felt like coming home.

"My God, yeah," he recalls. "It was a really deeply resonant, emotional, affirming moment. This music that I've been passionate about for 40-something years. Tangerine Dream and that primordial sequencer piece, they just seemed to blow a hole in time and space." **CW**

COME TOGETHER

There's a slight air of world weariness about The Pineapple Thief. The band have been in Gavin Harrison's studio, rehearsing for their upcoming tour to support their new album, *It Leads To This*, and there's the sense that it's been an elongated, potentially mildly frustrating day of missed cues and occasional bum notes.

"Gavin doesn't sugar-coat anything," reveals frontman Bruce Soord, referencing the band's drummer with a knowing smile. "So we're in the studio now, we play a song, record it and gather around the speakers and listen back to it. The first time you play it through, it's quite brutal. We have this dynamic in the band where we have an ordered section and a chaos section, but I'm not going to tell you where the chaos section is. It's an interesting dynamic and there's a lot of patience with one certain member of the band. It's quite a nice environment because nobody cares if someone says, 'Don't do it like that', 'I don't like that sound' or 'Actually play it right next time.' It's all fine, although that last one generally only comes my way."

Such comments could be indicative of a band embroiled in disheartening studio friction, but the lack of animosity between

A quarter-of-a-century ago Bruce Soord founded **The Pineapple Thief** as a creative outlet for himself. Originally intended as a solo project, it soon grew beyond his expectations and the quartet's latest album, *It Leads To This*, finds them switching things up even further. *Prog* catches up with Soord, drummer Gavin Harrison and bassist Jon Sykes to discuss their current release and find out why its creation turned out to be such a cathartic experience.

Words: Rich Wilson
Images: Tina Korhonen

the musicians is palpable. It's merely the kind of jovial, lampooning mentality that relieves stressful situations in any collection of close bandmates. There's also a transparent desire to ensure that their live presentation is as consummate as their evocative recordings. Indeed, it's startling to consider that this year is The Pineapple Thief's 25th anniversary, even if there have been drastic changes that have transformed the band over that time.

"It's impossible to think of it as one thing," considers Soord. "It really feels like three separate entities. There was the first entity, which was just me alone in the studio. Then we signed to Kscope and started to do small tours with the band. I think then this current entity started in 2016, when we met Gavin for the *Your Wilderness* album. So that's really how I look back on it and compartmentalise it all. That's why it still feels fresh to me because this is only the fourth proper studio album that we've done with this lot."

That new album that Soord references is another captivating release that possesses all the classic Pineapple Thief signatures. Perhaps more guitar-heavy than its predecessor, it was assembled using a different writing style. Whereas over recent years, the band have digitally exchanged files, this time Soord and Harrison began writing the album together, as a duo, in the drummer's north London home studio.

"It was like an old-school way of doing it," suggests Soord. "I had been so used to working alone, where I would come up with an idea and then send it to the guys. Gavin would send a drum idea back or chop things up and I would just think, 'Oh well, I've a couple of days to faff around with this.' There was no pressure. It's hard work when you're on your own, as you think, 'I'll make myself a cup of coffee and do it tomorrow.' As we all have our own studios, it's a little bit of a double-edged sword. You can get a bit complacent and, dare I say it myself [looking at the rest of the band], a bit lazy. When you're sat there together in a room, it's a completely different mindset. It was good and a lot of the songs came out of that session."

"I think that was the first time we were actually in the same room together," adds Harrison. "Before that, it was an internet love affair, sending files backwards and forwards. You do something but you might not get a response to it for a couple of days, whereas this was in the second. I'd play something and there was instant feedback."

The band's latest release, the captivating *It Leads To This*, is out now!

From the perspective of an outsider, the combination of guitarist and drummer crafting much of the material together, without the involvement of Steve Kitch (keyboards) or bassist Jon Sykes may seem relatively quirky. While there is a declared willingness of all four members to convene to write together in the future, Harrison expresses a certain reticence about the idea.

"You can just end up with a half-an-hour jam in E," he argues dryly with a smile. "I have done it before and it's very hard because you have three people all trying to contribute harmonically. If it's just a drummer with a guitarist or keyboard player, then you can change the key, the tonality, change the time signature, all on the fly.

The Pineapple Thief: no genital cuffs were involved in making their new album...

"I think that the good thing about coming to Gavin's studio was that I was pushed out of my comfort zone."

Bruce Soord

When there are three people all trying to play chords, asking, 'What's that? Is that in E and then it's a D?' You know, they're just falling over each other and it's not an organic process. It usually works best with one harmonics player and a drummer. It's a bit easier to manoeuvre around each other and dance around, rather than three people all trying to contribute harmonically."

"I think there are pros and cons," suggests Sykes diplomatically. "It gives you a fresh approach and you'll get something different to what you would have if you'd done it on your own. I think there's also a benefit to the way we always did it, writing separately, because you get a different type of organic progress. Quite often, we're not even talking. The communication is through files with music on. That must give you a different result to when you are face to face saying,'What about this?' I think it's probably good to mix it up."

For all the core material created by the Soord-Harrison partnership, the input of the full band has been critical in shaping the sound of the new album. Indeed, Sykes suggests that The Pineapple Thief now feels more like a "proper" close band than at any time in their past.

"It definitely feels like more of a band project these days," he ruminates. "There will be a demo base that Bruce will have sent, which might be just a drone sound or something, which gives me a lot of space to develop. Usually, I'm responding to what Gavin has done and it does sometimes change the path of a song or might result in a bigger change to one of the sections. We don't really talk about references or anything like that. There isn't a steer to say, 'Make it sound like this', so for me it's completely organic. You can just do whatever you think sounds right."

For all the innate, internal satisfaction with the quality of the album, Soord reveals that its

"In a more progressive way, you can do things that are not technically complicated but are things when you think, 'Well, I've never heard a band play with this rhythm before', which at very least gives us something that's unique and interesting."

Gavin Harrison

They're a proper band now, don't you know! L-R: Bruce Soord, Jon Sykes, Gavin Harrison, Steve Kitch.

creation was one of the most intense periods he can recall in the band's history. That was seemingly caused by a combination of an internal desire to ensure The Pineapple Thief don't stagnate and the challenge of playing some of the more complicated compositions.

"I think that boils down to just trying to better yourself every record," he admits. "I'm not saying that it always happens like that, but as an artist, that's your aim. I pushed myself personally to a higher level. There was a period when the album was coming together when you're thinking, 'Right, this is how it's going to be.' Then things start to ramp up and everybody wants it to be as good as it could possibly be. We're all pushing each other and we all have ideas as to where we think it should go. Luckily, we're all pretty much on the same page but that doesn't mean that there isn't healthy tension. So, it was an intense time getting it finished. I think that the good thing about coming to Gavin's was that I was pushed out of my comfort zone. There's one track called *Rubicon*, where Gavin just had a rhythm that I hadn't heard before. I was completely out of my comfort zone but in a good way. It's about pushing in every aspect, playing, writing words, and the sound."

Those familiar with the band's back catalogue will be aware that the introduction of Harrison into the ranks has altered their music, frequently adding complex, unexpected rhythmic patterns that embellish their sound. As one of the world's most technically gifted drummers, do the rest of the band ever have to rein him in?

"No, I didn't have the genital cuffs on," says Harrison with a smile. "I try to do something unique, play some rhythms that you've never heard before, things that you couldn't say, 'Oh, there's a record just like that with that exact rhythm.' With music that's moving into a popular area, you get very limited, everything in 4/4 and there's almost nothing you can do that hasn't been done before. In a more progressive way, you can do things that aren't technically complicated but are things when you think, 'I've never heard a band play with this rhythm before', which at very least gives us something that's unique and interesting."

The carefully crafted musical backdrop is a perfect foil for Soord's lyrics. Known for introspective tales that reference some of his personal, internal conflicts, the songs gathered together on *It Leads To This* continue his desire to attempt to comprehend the world.

"I remember making a conscious decision about what the theme of the record would be," he recalls.

"It started in the depths of the pandemic, when we started to write the first track, which was *Put It Right*. It was a time of reflection because you were forced into this solitary confinement of your house. I was lucky because I had the studio in my garden, so it was OK. So that definitely set the tone, but effectively, I feel it's a continuation of the theme of the last album, which was basically looking at the world that we live in and thinking: What's going on? How can I make sense of it, as it's all getting a bit fucked up? Then in 2023 you look at it and think, 'My God, how did it get this bad? This wasn't in the script.' That kind of relates to the *It Leads To This* title, but at the same time, it's not all negative. It's a positive message, which is that it's in our power to change it. Writing about it is a way of dealing with it. It's tackling it head on. Even now, we're playing the songs together for the first time as a band and it feels really good to sing it. It's a cathartic experience."

It Leads To This is out now via Kscope.
See pineapplethief.com for more information.

Books Of Wonder

Nostalgia isn't a word that's often associated with **Bill Nelson**, and yet he views the past through rose-tinted spectacles on his latest solo albums, *All The Fun Of The Fair* and *Starlight Stories*. The forward-thinking Be-Bop Deluxe and Red Noise bandleader tells *Prog* about his childhood heroes, beating the challenges of ageing and the flurry of new releases that are waiting in the wings.

Words: Chris Roberts **Images:** Martin Bostock

With two new albums released in recent months and plenty in progress, it's safe to say Bill Nelson remains, at 75, as inspired and prolific as ever. One reason for this may be that he came from a devotedly musical family.

"The day I was born, December 18, 1948, my mum was starting to go into labour, but knew my dad had a gig at the town hall in Wakefield for the Lord Mayor's Christmas Ball," he chuckles. "So she didn't tell my dad she'd started – it was an important gig for him and she knew he'd not go. She packed him off to the gig, and only then called the midwife!"

“I don’t perform live any more because of health issues, but recording I can still manage to do despite failing eyesight. It keeps me sane, in a way.”

Bill Nelson: a man of many notes and ideas.

His dad was a saxophonist who had a Big Band in the 50s "when I was a kid. So music was always around for me. My mother was in a tap-dancing troupe, that's how they met. I had a cousin who was a jazz trumpeter, another who was a classical and flamenco guitarist. So, it was definitely in the air."

Music still surrounds Nelson in the 2020s, and he records at home in Yorkshire, several hours a day.

"I'll start around 5pm or 6pm, have a half-hour break for dinner at 9pm, then go back and work until midnight or 1am. I like recording at that time. Somehow there's less energy in the ether from other people. Everyone's gone to bed and in a strange way there's more oxygen for me to focus."

Does he love it as much as ever?

"Oh yes, I enjoy it tremendously," he replies in his warm, light, Yorkshire burr. "I keep coming up with new ideas so it's an ongoing process. Basically, I don't perform live any more because of health issues, but recording I can still manage to do despite failing eyesight. It keeps me sane, in a way."

His visionary talent informs the range and verve of these two latest records, *Starlight Stories* and *All The Fun Of The Fair*, as it has his half-century-plus career. That's covered left-field pop success, glam, prog, electronica, ambient experimentation, and now an assured cult status as an artist revered not just by his loyal fanbase but by other musicians. (He's collaborated over the years with everyone from David Sylvian to Cabaret Voltaire, Yellow Magic Orchestra to Harold Budd, and Johnny Marr often namechecks him.) Since the heady days of Be-Bop Deluxe and Red Noise, he's released an astonishing number of albums, clearly more comfortable away from the old industry and label norms.

"I can get very self-critical listening to my own stuff," he says. "But everything has flaws anyway. There's only apparent perfection. If you look under the surface, anything has blemishes. And with my work now, I think that's what makes it sound like me. Most bands have bigger budgets, but many end up with that super-polished finish, which makes everything sound the same. So, there's something to be said for the limitations I inhabit, with me doing all the engineering and everything here in what was a small bedroom. I always get more excited by the next thing than the last thing I did."

Before he gets immersed in the next thing, he's persuaded to talk about the recent releases. They make a contrasting but complementary pair. *Starlight Stories* is dreamy, introspective. *All The Fun Of The Fair* is more exuberant, flamboyant. The spark for the former was a nostalgic memory from childhood, wherein his mother read to him from books that she herself first encountered as a child, almost 100 years ago.

"It's strange; I rarely go in with a plan, I just see what happens. But that idea emerged, and then

The dreamy *Starlight Stories*.

tracks coalesced into a cohesive whole. Those 1920s books were full of Art Nouveau illustrations and fantasy pictures, evoking all kinds of strangeness. I've got a couple still — huge, thick books, with oddball stories and poems. Blake, HG Wells, an abbreviated-for-kids version of *Don Quixote*, plus more obscure stuff. There was something romantic and ethereal about them. A sense of wonder."

Titles like *Sailing Through Skies Of Blue* and *Goodbye Golden Sands* set the mood before the album even starts.

"*Goodbye Golden Sands* came from recalling when my folks had a chalet on the east coast, in a chalet park called Golden Sands. But out of curiosity I looked on Google Maps recently and the entire area had been washed away by the sea. This was quite a shock; that whole area — disappeared."

Although this record may nestle with nostalgia, Nelson's career has famously been futuristic, forward-looking. There were phases, notably in the 80s, where it seemed he was suffering for being ahead of his time as he stirred together ideas, instruments, genres. Nowadays, though, he's happy to embrace both the past and what's yet to come.

"There's a dichotomy now, yes," he muses. "I don't know if it's because I've come to a certain age. These days I suppose there's more to look back on than there is to look forward to, as time's running out. Then again, once an album's out, I rarely listen to it again.

"Most bands have bigger budgets, but many end up with that super-polished finish, which makes everything sound the same. So there's something to be said for the limitations I inhabit, with me doing all the engineering and everything here in what was a small bedroom."

I'm thinking: what's next? For instance, the 70s and Be-Bop Deluxe — as much as I'm proud of that, it's 40-odd years ago, y'know? It doesn't much relate to me here and now.

"Yet I do like drawing on things from the past and putting them in a fresh new context. The electric guitar is still a fundamental feature of what I do, but I try to surround it with other things — electronica, samples, glitches and so on. So I'm not sticking with the standard rock stereotypes."

Nostalgic: *All The Fun Of The Fair*.

Prog has spoken with him at length about the Be-Bop Deluxe days and sassy art-glam reissues on previous occasions. Just for fun, we wonder which are Nelson's personal favourites among his old band's albums?

"Gosh, that's hard, you see, because I always like a few tracks from one, a few from another. We were young! So I'll say individual songs. Off the top of my head, I'm fond of *Crying To The Sky*, *Adventures In A Yorkshire Landscape*, *Visions Of Endless Hopes*, *Love Is Swift Arrows*, and *Darkness (L'Immoraliste)*. Otherwise, it's like choosing between children!"

If *Starlight Stories* is as ruminative as a Pre-Raphaelite painting, Nelson's other new piece has more in common with Pop Art.

"Yes, though the phrase, 'all the fun of the fair' has sinister undertones, perhaps because I was thinking of Ray Bradbury's book *Something Wicked This Way Comes*. Again,

This guitar definitely isn't gathering any dust!

since I was a child, fairgrounds have always been somewhat attractive but somewhat weird! Then, of course, the rides can be seen as the ups and downs you experience in life: bad things and good things. As with circuses or clowns, there's a sense of: should I be laughing, or running away? So yeah, there's a theatricality and spookiness on that record. Yes, it's much more 'rock' than *Starlight Stories*. But never orthodox…"

His release schedules aren't orthodox either. Are those who buy his albums able to keep up?

"I'm fortunate, in that respect. They do seem to get into it and come back for more. Part of that is that it's never the same thing! I don't plough one furrow, there's an element of surprise each time. There was a time in the 80s when keyboards and synths were predominant in what I did, then I went more ambient, abstract. But now all of those things can come into play — rock, jazz — they're all likely to be in there, not fighting with each other but trying to harmonise. I remember, back in the 70s, expressing my frustration at the pace at which the music industry worked. I said I'd love to release an album per month, like a magazine. People thought I was insane! But now most of us are free of all that. I've got three volumes of guitar instrumentals called *Guitars Of Tomorrow* almost ready, and half a dozen albums held over from pandemic time: *Powertron*, *Magnetic Travels*, *Phantom Fuzzbox*, *Studio Cadet*… these will all soon be mastered, and hopefully come out."

Nelson's unconventional way of thinking stems back to his youth. The freedom he experienced as a student at Wakefield College Of Art seems as significant in shaping his output as his musical roots.

"I was encouraged to go because I liked to draw, and that was one of those moments when your outlook on life changes drastically," he reflects. "We were given freedom to be responsible for our own education. We were taught, and very well, but allowed our own approach. And at that time, late '65/'66, the music scene was catching fire, too. With the beginnings of what became psychedelia, and so on. It all fed off each other. I discovered John Cage, Stockhausen, Jean Cocteau — all these things opened doors, musically, visually."

After pondering whether music and art still spin off each other in the 21st century (he admits he doesn't keep up with pop music nowadays), Nelson recalls that in the early 80s he toured an ambitious project called The Invisibility Exhibition, with "the Yorkshire Actors doing plays, Japanese duo Frank Chickens performing, Richard Jobson reading his poetry, and my brother and I improvising over taped backing tracks — and people were open to it. They gave it a try, and enjoyed it. Barriers between disciplines came down. That echoed for me the 60s, when art and music blossomed: fertile, colourful."

Stretching even further back, he adds that his original guitar heroes, as a teenager, were Duane Eddy and The Shadows.

"Speaking of which, I got an email from Duane Eddy this morning…" he comments.

It transpires that since Nelson was asked to present Eddy with an award in London some years ago, they've become friends.

"The first single I ever got of his was *Because They're Young*, when I was 10. They might say a record can't change your life — this one did. And now we stay in touch — my first hero!"

Nelson himself is, of course, the guitar hero of many, but it's his versatility and ongoing spirit of musical adventure that has kept his restless yield intriguing for so long. Frustratingly, diabetes has led to sight problems which now hinder him working onscreen ("It's hard to see the right thing to click on").

"So", he says philosophically, "that's maybe, subconsciously, another spur to try and get as much as possible done while I still can."

He's previously persevered despite a hearing issue, too.

"I'm still totally deaf in my right ear. But the strange thing is, when I record I can hear stereo, with one ear. I don't know how that works! Something to do with my brain being trained to the vibrations…"

It's to be hoped that Bill Nelson and his good vibrations long continue to bedazzle us with artful abundance.

"Something always seems to jump out and say, 'Try me!'" he says with a smile. "There's a lot still to come."

Starlight Stories and All The Fun Of The Fair are out now via Sonoluxe. See www.billnelson.com for more information.

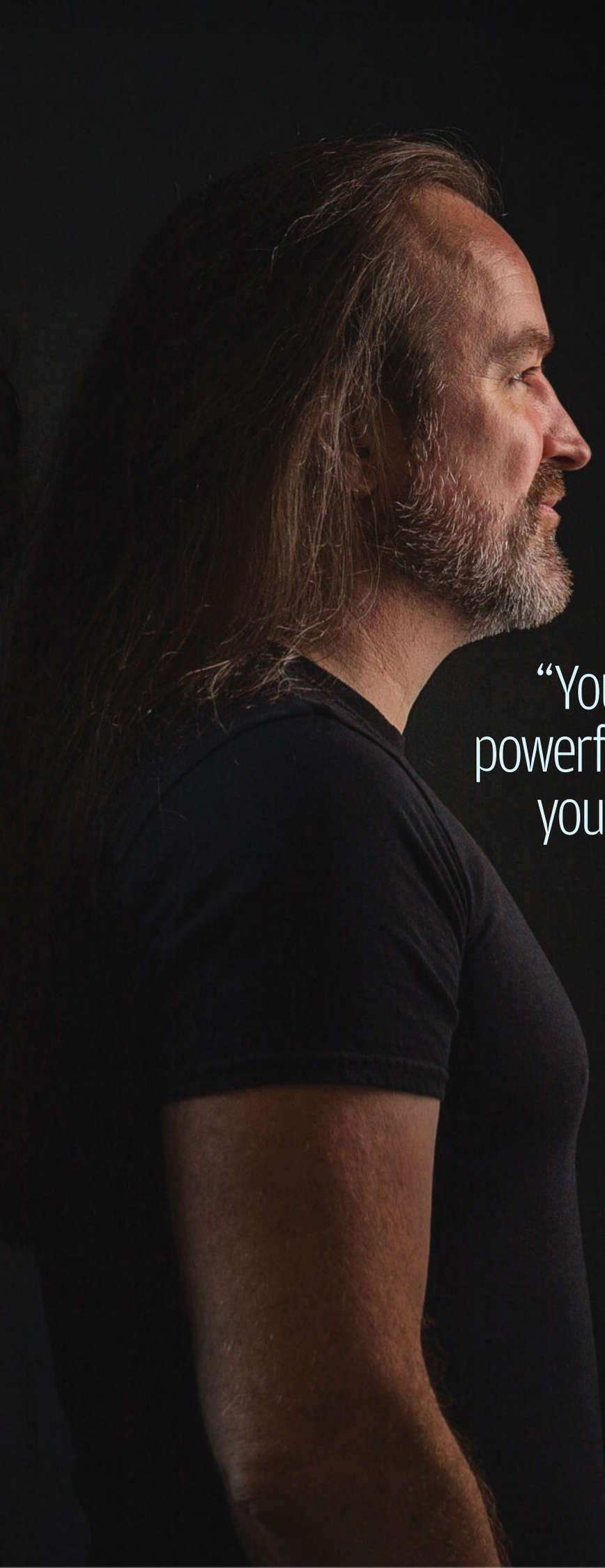
Some double acts were just meant to be. **Wilson & Wakeman** – Arena vocalist Damian Wilson and Black Sabbath keysman Adam Wakeman – have become one of prog's most creative duos, with a chemistry that's unrivalled. Their latest album, *Can We Leave The Light On Longer?*, finds the pair exploring topics from AI to absent friends via some of the most heartfelt and tear-jerking songs *Prog*'s heard in a while. We caught up with them to find out more.

Words: Jo Kendall **Images:** Jan de Wild

Lightbulb Sons

It's 11am and mayhem on the other side of the Zoom call. Tuning in from the former's home studio in Buckinghamshire, Adam Wakeman and Damian Wilson are in fits of giggles, faux-bickering, and have set up an elaborate show for this interview where Wakeman asks if he can move Wilson's acoustic guitar as he's concerned about its preservation, which he then picks up and tumbles onto, behind Wilson, with much comedy clanging. Wilson, meanwhile, has a radio cassette-player that he's fiddling with and keeps pressing play on a tape titled *The Best Of Rick Wakeman*, a prop for upcoming live shows that's designed to irk his bandmate.

Prog is having flashbacks. At Cropredy in 2019 the duo were post-show and tiddly, this interviewer playing a Mary Poppins role in bringing the performers down from near-levitating around a Portakabin just like the *I Love To Laugh* scene.



When you're around them, even screen-to-screen, the chemistry is like lightning. Best of friends, brilliantly entertaining, they can write a decent tune or two. They met nearly 30 years ago via their mutual musician-producer friend Fraser T Smith – when Wilson was moving from Landmarq to Threshold, with Ayreon guest spots and a spell touring in *Les Misérables* on the horizon – and gelled for life.

"I went to your house and you had a floor-to-ceiling PA in your room," Wakeman says. "I thought, 'Imagine what he's like on the road. This guy means business.' Then we started writing and rehearsing together."

This led to forming prog metal act Headspace, but not all songs were made for a full-throttle, floor-to-ceiling PA type of presentation, and the pair aren't just about tomfoolery and high jinks. Over eight years together as a duo, deeper ideas have emerged through their mainly acoustic piano-and-guitar style, from 2016's *Weir Keeper's Tale*, 2018's *The Sun Will Dance In Its Twilight Hour* and the recently released record, *Can We Leave The Light On Longer?*.

> "You know you've got a good, powerful song if you're bent over your guitar in floods of tears."
> **Damian Wilson**

Written and recorded in the rare downtime when Wakeman wasn't playing with Black Sabbath, or the unexpectedly popular Blue Note-style Jazz Sabbath, and between Wilson's engagements with Arena, Kayak's Edward Reekers and his own One Knight Only band shows, *Can We Leave The Light On Longer?* is about "life, and the chaos that makes us human", Wilson says. "It's also asking, 'Can we experience life, just a little longer?'"

The opening track, *A I*, is about something extremely worrying to Wilson. "I don't understand why we're giving so much information out about us so freely, everywhere," he says. "And it's not just the information, it's the connection with algorithms, facial recognition and AI, where everything comes together. We're producing a fantastic prison for ourselves."

Every day we're using AI (whether we realise it or not), and in itself it's not harmful. But in the wrong hands…

"We're being played heavily all the time," he continues. "We're getting wise to this now, and I think of my dad having this scammer a week before

he died, but he was great with it. His bank account could have been cleared out… but he had nothing in it, just enough to cover costs for his funeral."

Wakeman admits that if an AI-sampled message request for money came through from his daughter, currently travelling around Cambodia, he'd rather send cash than not.

"What concerns me more is the political side of things," says Wilson. "With all these things being used against us, the lack of freedom is apparent. Somebody's got an awful lot of power."

Other topics on the record are more personal. As is customary, Wakeman sings on two numbers. *November*'s inspiration is a step-parent with dementia, looking at the world from their point of view. *The Man From The Island* comes from Wakeman's teenage years.

"I went to school on the Isle Of Man, for about three years," he says. "My dad was always away. There was loads of music on the island and when I was 16 I got myself into a band with Anglin Buttimore and two other guys. This is where I cut my teeth, playing three, four, five nights a week.

"Anglin passed away in 2020. It took me ages to finish the song for him, but it was a bit like therapy and I wanted it to be good. I actually finished when Damian and I were on tour on the Isle. I played it the night it was completed and Anglin's wife Jen was there."

"It was amazing," says Wilson. "I was side-of-stage and said to him, 'You've literally just written that, and you're going to perform it? OK.' But he got me [clutches chest]. It was a beautiful rendition, much better than on the album [laughs]."

Wakeman then added the talents of a local community choir thanks to his old school friend Mandy Griffin, a singing teacher and music director.

"I wanted a hymn-like part at the start, and Mandy gathered her crew. Then Dave The Chem — no one has a surname on the Isle, and he used to run the chemist — recorded it for me and sent it over."

Also using a church and gospel sound is *Let's Talk*.

"That's a break-up song," says Wilson. "It's heartbreak and tragedy… isn't it funny how our best friends can then become our worst enemies? I love music and I refuse to have malice enter it. So whatever might have happened, after the initial emotions, I'll throw that malice away."

"This is what we have with our music," Wakeman says. "The song-writing is genuine, even if it's not a direct experience of ours."

"You know you've got a good, powerful song if you're bent over your guitar in floods of tears." Wilson nods.

> "I think it's our most personal, yet encompassing, album."
> **Adam Wakeman**

He details "his own mindset" with *Multiplicity* — "I'm not diagnosed with anything, but I have a child in my head as well as the reasonable, rational side, and I don't need it labelling" — and speaks of his nephew with *Hero*, who took his own life in 2023. "Adam was absolutely amazing on this," he says. "In support as well as songwriting."

It might not be a tear-jerker, but the jaunty *The Battle Of The Bare Knuckle Fighter* is dedicated to their friend and dance music DJ Paul Spencer, aka Dario G, currently being treated for cancer.

"It's got trumpet on it, which he plays," says Wilson. "Paul's a real fighter, and part of that is his amazing positivity."

Leaning into self-improvement, *Turn Your Life Around* is about "the spirit of the road", making a case for 'it's never too late to make a change.'

"I thought that was about my neighbour shouting at Damian when he pulled his van up on his driveway," Wakeman says.

"The van I'm living in…" Wilson says. Ah yes, let's circle back to Cropredy in 2019 when, just before the festival, Wilson's houseboat sank on the Thames, with all his stuff on board.

"I just managed to dive in and get my guitar," he remembers.

Home sweet home is now his Mercedes Sprinter, a "rust bucket".

"I can hear you coming from miles off," says Wakeman. "And the next sound I hear is my neighbours locking their sheds."

Oh, the banter, it continues, especially with some mickey-taking from Wakeman around Wilson's track, *Addlestone*, where he recalls his childhood in Surrey, riding wild horses (and trying to impress older girls).

Laughter aside, what was the aim for *Can We Leave The Light On Longer?*.

"This was for listeners who don't go for Sabbath, or the heavy stuff we do," says Wakeman. "I think it's our most personal, yet encompassing, album yet. Lyrically, listeners can pull different things from the songs, but it's been more of a window into what's been going on in Damian's life and the people that are close to him."

"But the best songs are *our* songs," Wilson says. "I always want my music to connect with a listener. But the reason for these albums is my continuing connection to Adam. That's the most important thing."

Can We Leave The Light On Longer? is out now via Blacklake. See www.wilsonwakeman.com for more.

Tears and laughter: Adam Wakeman and Damian Wilson.

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Hats Off, Gentlemen!

Two albums and four years into their existence and with their music already labelled by some as 'what The Beatles might have done if they hadn't split up', in 1973 cheeky Bristol prog types **Stackridge** found themselves in a studio with their production hero George Martin. But were they about to lose their heads for *The Man In The Bowler Hat*?

Titfer tat: Jo Kendall
Image: David Redfern/Redferns/Getty Images

Still pals at Ally Pally. Stackridge onstage at London's Alexandra Palace in August 1973.

Rising from the ashes of the *Goon Show*-inspired Griptight Thynne and morphing from Stackridge Lemon to just Stackridge, by 1973 the knockabout Bristol pop-proggers had racked up some serious milestones in four years of existence.

Initially comprised of Andrew Cresswell-Davis (sometimes credited as Andy Davis) on guitar, keyboards and vocals; James Warren on guitar and vocals; James 'Crun' Walter on bass (Crun was also a Goons name); Michael 'Mutter' Slater on flute and vocals; Mike Evans on violin; and Billy 'Sparkle' Bent on drums, the bandmembers had met in the clubs and bars of Bristol such as Acker Bilk's Old Granary and The Dug Out. The players' chemistry went from performing pop and blues covers to original songs infused with a Bonzo Dog Band playfulness and eclecticism, taking in classical music, tea dance and music hall, rock, pop, folk and anything else that took their fancy culturally, created with humour and heart. They soon positioned themselves as a slapstick alternative to the popular rock du jour.

"We drew from every imaginable source," James Warren tells *Prog* in a phone interview. "It was a weird mixture of Beatles, Frank Zappa and The Incredible String Band, and a healthy dose of musical theatre and humour."

"We were determined to not be denim-clad like Free, Status Quo or Black Sabbath," Mutter Slater tells us. "We wore waistcoats, grey flannels and braces. James wore slippers."

Stackridge opened and closed the first Glastonbury Festival in 1970, recorded two well-received albums on MCA (1971's *Stackridge* and 1972's *Friendliness*), toured with Wishbone Ash and Renaissance, appeared on *The Old Grey Whistle Test*, and recorded a Radio 1 session for John Peel. After playing more than 300 shows, they'd garnered a battalion of enthusiastic and rather nutty fans, known for bringing props to gigs to join in with numbers that required participation such as *Marzo Plod* with its rhubarb-thrashing, or dustbin lids for *Four Poster Bed (Let There Be Lids)*.

1974's The Man In The Bowler Hat.

Following the Cockney-Edwardiana dance-craze single *Do The Stanley*, a February to March UK tour saw them supported by Camel, and their next big achievement was just over the hump. As avid Beatles and *Goon Show* fans, it was almost all too much for the fluctuating five-, six- or seven-piece: the recording of album number three, *The Man In The Bowler Hat*, would be with The Goons label manager and fifth Beatle himself, George Martin.

Stackridge's creative life was almost 'easy' by today's standards: most bandmembers and their roadie Pete Donovan shared a flat in Clifton, Bristol, living on a shoestring (and the dole). Later, as they got more popular, three nights a week they had digs in Bayswater, London, secured by their dedicated agent-turned-manager Mike Tobin. Each day was filled with writing and playing, gigs and recording the means to their modest ends.

"I think back and wonder how the hell we ever managed to stay under the same roof for a year or two because we were incredibly different people, but we had a fun *Monty Python*-ish sort of time," says Warren.

Promoting *Friendliness*, the band were frequently in the capital, or playing nearby towns. George Martin's sons Greg and Alexis were often in the audience.

"I think back and wonder how the hell we ever managed to stay under the same roof for a year or two because we were incredibly different people, but we had a fun *Monty Python*-ish sort of time."
James Warren

Stackridge having a blast at Reading Festival in August 1973.

"They loved us," says Warren. "We'd see them at gigs and get chatting, and around the same time our manager Mike was offered a job with George Martin's AIR Enterprises, a band agency and producers' agency."

Tobin was an effective businessman with a good ear and had been successful at Bristol's Plastic Dog agency and London's John Sherry Enterprises. He didn't directly deal with Martin, but he was in the perfect location to approach him with an idea.

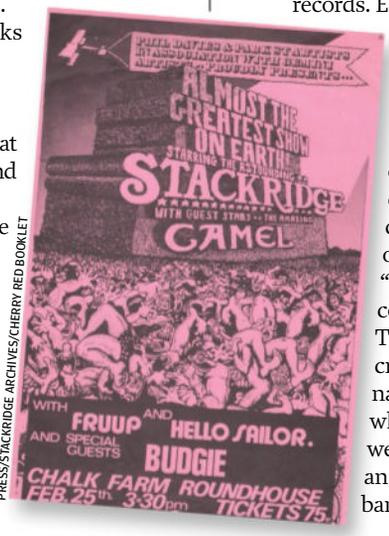
"Because George was coming into the office regularly, Mike got friendly with him," Warren says. "One day he had the temerity to say, 'Greg and Alexis have been coming to my band's gigs and they absolutely love them. Would you be interested in listening to some demos they've done for their next album?' George agreed, and he obviously much liked what he heard, because — to our utter astonishment and amazement — he agreed to record and produce an album. It was a total dream. Being the huge Beatles fans that we were, it just didn't seem possible that we'd somehow join that sort of world."

In preparation for the sessions, Stackridge were invited to Martin's place in Paddington, and most of the band — Warren, Slater, Walter and Evans, but not Cresswell-Davis, who had married — were relocated to Stansfield Road, Stockwell (the street where David Bowie was born), "and two girls from the Bayswater flat moved in, too," laughs Warren.

"We spent about a week or two going [to George's]," he continues. "We had to plan all the tracks that we were interested in recording. George would cogitate a bit, going, 'We could do this or that and that would work quite nicely,' and so on. He was earmarking songs that he could do some orchestral arrangements for, and then a big production number on."

"We were a bit starstruck and didn't know how meeting George would go," says Slater, "but he's an avuncular man and one of his gifts was putting you at ease."

With a title inspired by Magritte's surrealist painting — a man in a bowler hat isn't on the cover, but there's a young woman in some sort of titfer, wearing an apron — the album tracks were as wide-ranging in style as in the past two records. Each member was encouraged to come up with musical ideas, and much lyric writing was done by a partnership of Warren, Jim Walter and Mutter Slater, which would occur "late at night, after coming back from gigs, over copious cups of tea and bowls of muesli," says Warren — "the burning of the midnight cornflakes" as Slater puts it. These compositions would be credited to the charmingly named 'Smegmakovitch', while whole group co-writes went under 'Wabadaw Sleeve', an anagram of letters from bandmembers' names.



PRESS/STACKRIDGE ARCHIVES/CHERRY RED BOOKLET

Flashback to the early days when Stackridge almost ruled the world, with Camel as support.

FIN COSTELLO/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

The band had 10 days for recording and two for mixing at AIR Studios, which was then right in the centre of the West End, in Oxford Circus (above what is now NikeTown).

"George was away quite a lot as he was working with Mahavishnu Orchestra or Jeff Beck, and he'd be flying to New York for meetings," says Warren. "We had Geoff Emerick and Bill Price engineering the album, and these extra musicians that George brought in for the orchestral parts of the album, and that was really exciting."

Opener *Fundamentally Yours* has Martin on keys and was "a lovely tune by Andy Davis," says Warren. It's followed by the nostalgic paean to village life *Pinafore Days* written by Slater, who was now composing on piano as well as flute. *Pinafore Days* was also the title of the North American version of the album.

"On *Stackridge* I just did flute parts," he says. "But I really liked what everyone else was doing and knew I had to up my game to have a song accepted. By the third album I was one of the major contributors."

The power-poptastic *The Last Plimsoll* is a standout, with gangsterish lyrics.

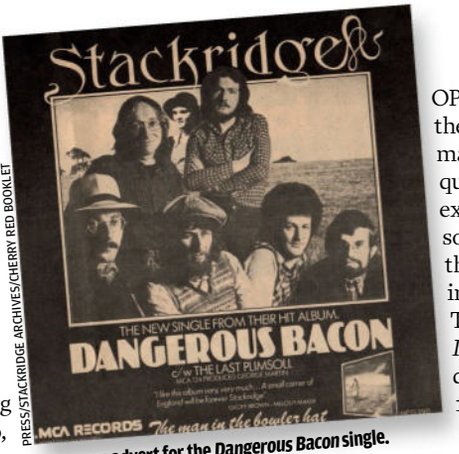
"Because of the music we thought the lyric should have a dark underbelly," says Warren. "But we always tried to not be too literal and wanted to introduce strange, stream-of-consciousness phrases into the songs, too."

To The Sun And Moon was written by Slater using a poem by his friend Deno, from his hometown of Yeovil. *Abbey Road*-esque, Martin's orchestral hand is strong here, and the track finishes with Spanish guitar that leads into a Latin-flavoured, violin-powered *The Road To Venezuela*.

Slater recalls Martin's aid in the studio with his track *The Galloping Gaucho*.

"We started on the first chord and bashed our way through [laughs]. George said, 'I think we can make this more interesting. Let's have a Hammond organ and a triangle on the intro, we'll build it from there.' He taught us about dynamics and properly using the range of instruments in the band."

Warren's ideas surfaced in the gentle "ecological plea" *Humiliation* and the McCartney-esque *Dangerous Bacon*.



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The press advert for the Dangerous Bacon single.

> **"We were a bit starstruck and didn't know how meeting George Martin would go, but he's an avuncular man and one of his gifts was putting you at ease."**
> **Michael 'Mutter' Slater**

"*Dangerous Bacon* was a Smegmakovitch tour-de-force, named by Jim who would say that meat-eating wasn't just bad for animals but for the eater, too."

It featured Andy Mackay on sax as Roxy Music were playing in AIR at the same time.

"George or Geoff set that up — we didn't get to know them," says Warren.

Cresswell-Davis and his friend Graham Smith — from his time playing in bands in Weston-super-Mare — came up with folky hymn *The Indifferent Hedgehog* with Martin on piano. Then comes the Slater-led group finale, *God Speed The Plough*. Mutter had noticed the phrase while leafing through a magazine in a hotel in Shropshire; it belonged to some verse next to an illustration of a mug of cider.

"George obviously thought, 'Here's something I can get my teeth into,' and came up with this fabulous orchestration," says Warren.

"I was there for that overdub!" laughs Slater. "Watching George work with a group of string players… the mutual respect was tangible. It was done in two, three takes. Very impressive."

With the recording finished, a political situation threw a bin lid in the works: the OPEC oil crisis, where the resources for manufacturing vinyl quadrupled in price and export was prohibited to some territories, meant the western record industry ground to a halt. The release of *The Man In The Bowler Hat* was delayed until February 1974, by which point the personality differences meant a different Stackridge line-up would tour the record, and to some members its release came as a bit of a shock.

"We had a new manager and factions emerged," says Warren.

"I got fed up and went back to Yeovil and got a job as a petrol pump attendant," says Slater.

Each week he got the *Melody Maker*, reading it from cover-to-cover.

"One day I'm sat in the station with my feet up 'cos there's not much to do, and I see *The Man In The Bowler Hat* is at No.23 in the chart! I was living at my parents, with no phone. The last I'd heard of it was at a playback in AIR studio."

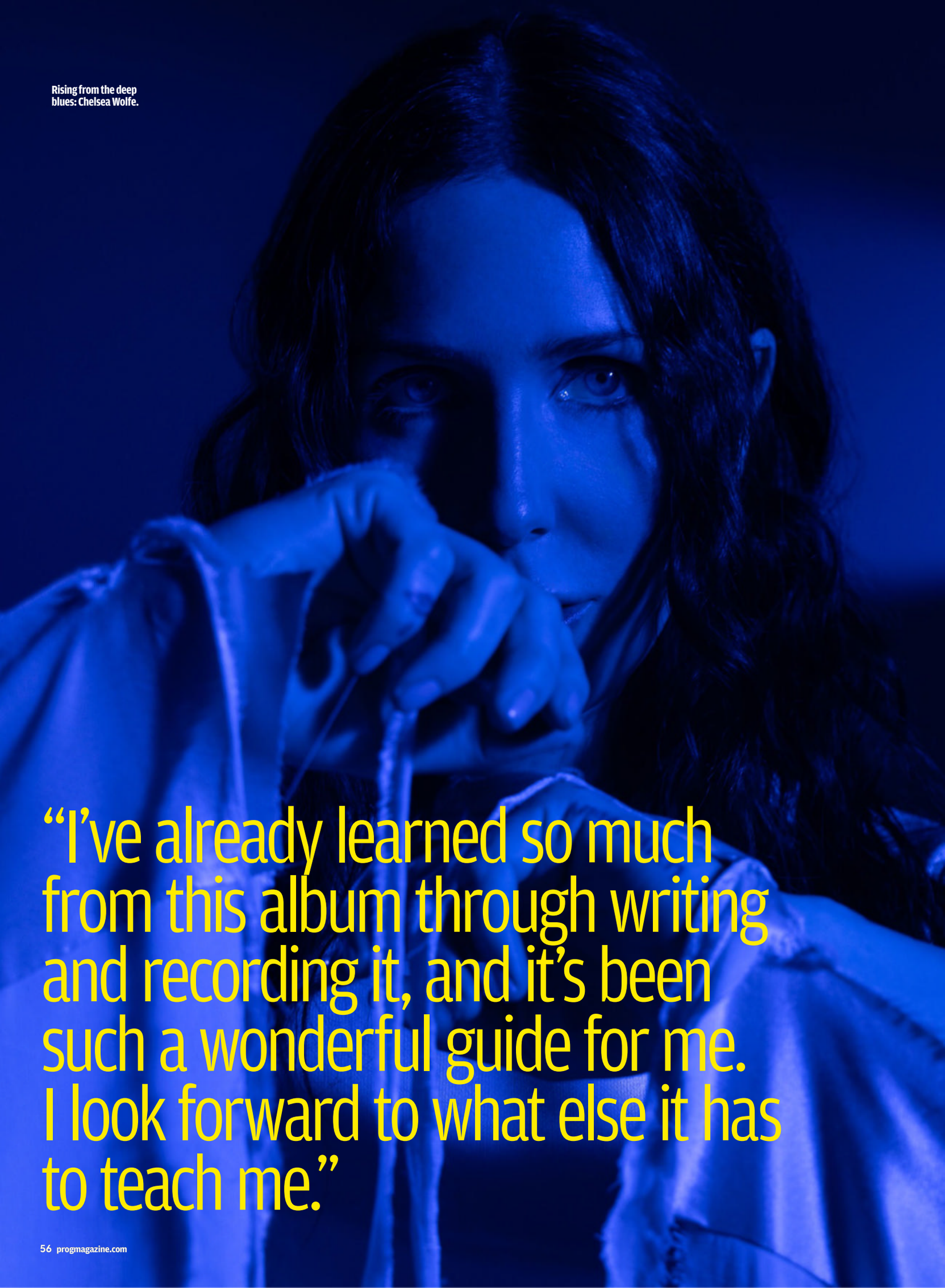
Although the studio experience had been exceptional and his childhood dream of being in a band had been realised with Stackridge, Slater was disillusioned. The band would dissolve after 1976's *Mr Mick*, reviving briefly for 1999's very creditable *Something For The Weekend*.

However, Stackridge *did* reunite from 2006 to 2015 and their catalogue is beloved by many. The Rhubarb Thrashers Club lives on — on Facebook and certain forums — with some of our favourite acts — Big Big Train, Schnauser, Steve Hogarth — being Stackridge devotees.

For Warren, the record lived up to his expectations and presented new opportunities.

"We learned the possibilities of what the studio can offer. You can create magic there, but you have to pay attention to details," he says. "We took that on board with the first [self-titled] album by The Korgis — formed by myself and Andy Davis in 1979. We thought, 'Let's follow Buggles' example and be a really good studio band and not tour.' Part of that came from *The Man In The Bowler Hat*."

The Man In The Bowler Hat is out now via Esoteric. See www.stackridge.co.uk for more information.



Rising from the deep blues: Chelsea Wolfe.

"I've already learned so much from this album through writing and recording it, and it's been such a wonderful guide for me. I look forward to what else it has to teach me."

The Healing

Self-examination and emotional purging are common themes explored on **Chelsea Wolfe**'s albums, but her latest, *She Reaches Out To She Reaches Out To She* is her most intimate yet. The experimental singer-songwriter, who has previously collaborated with Russian Circles and Myrkur, discusses rebirth, cutting ties with the past and a new-found sobriety that found her swapping dark folk and gothic blues for a more electronic sound.

Words: Cheri Faulkner **Images:** Ebru Yildiz

Chelsea Wolfe began work on the harrowingly beautiful *She Reaches Out To She Reaches Out To She* back in 2020, when she and her band were unable to get together in person to write.

"We sent ideas back and forth and the songs began to collage together," she explains. "And as time went on we were eventually able to gather together to finish the demos."

Despite the album's construction beginning in 2020, it wasn't until early 2022 that Wolfe and her band managed to get into the studio with producer Dave Sitek (Yeah Yeah Yeahs, Bat For Lashes, Pussy Riot, among others), to record the final versions. The follow-up to 2019's bluesy dark folk-inspired *Birth Of Violence* was created during Wolfe's process of getting sober following an alcohol addiction that, by all interpretations and her own admission, had controlled her life for quite some time. Those themes of rebirth and transformation are prevalent throughout.

New album, *She Reaches Out To She Reaches Out To She.*

"It's a death process of some sort, in order to be rebirthed as something new," she tells *Prog*. "As my mind and spirit started to clear up from the fog, my lyrics got clearer as well, and more intentional."

In Sitek's studio, Wolfe tells us, "elements of the demos were run through modular synths, different instrumentation was added, and the songs were transformed into something new as well — something more electronic and beat-driven than before."

This new sound deserved a new home and Wolfe entered into a partnership with Loma Vista Recordings (Ghost, Korn, Iggy Pop).

"When I was finished with the album, I knew I needed to find it a new record label, where this newly rebirthed music would be treated with care," she explains.

She announced the signing in September 2023 to coincide with the release of lead single and album closer, *Dusk*. Wolfe refers to the track as a "fantasy-core" contribution, a mythical love song that speaks of friends, or lovers, that have "gone through hell and back" but continue to return, to unite, "like pottery gone through the fire, broken and pieced back together".

These themes of healing, of being destroyed and repaired, are prevalent throughout *She Reaches Out To She Reaches Out To She* and Wolfe was conscious that she would need to provide a very raw and emotive performance to give the powerful subject matter the space it deserved.

"I decided to record a lot of the vocals very up-close and intimate in order to share the sort of rawness I was going through as I wrote these songs and subsequently lived them out," she explains.

Healing is not a linear process, though; it's never straightforward, and Wolfe used her own life experience and processes to express this stunted growth through her music.

"There are moments of purposeful minimalism and liminality in the music as well, to create spaces in between," she tells us.

While the album is a rebirth, it also lives in the void, the threshold, the in between space.

"The rebirth is happening in real time," she adds. "It's not something myself or this album has moved past."

Wolfe's experiences with alcoholism and her subsequent choice to remove that from her life feels irreversible when she speaks about it.

"There's a power in making decisions," she explains thoughtfully. "Cutting a cord from a person, place or habit that you know is holding you back or harming you is powerful."

Wolfe elaborates explaining that she had felt like a "passenger on the train" of her own life for some time.

"I was letting the tracks take me where they would, but I decided to walk on up, to be the conductor of the train, to make more clear decisions, even understanding that they may

not always be the right ones and that I'll still make mistakes."

Wolfe is raw and emotive when she expresses this, and underlines it with a compelling sentiment: "At least I'm taking responsibility for my own life."

In spring 2023, the album underwent a transformation with a vibrant new mix from Shawn Everett (Miley Cyrus, The Killers).

"I fought it away from the old and into the new," Wolfe explains. "Shawn Everett's mix was such a welcome, fresh energy for the songs. I think they needed that alchemy of his touch to bring them fully into the new."

Everett, Wolfe says, makes the album feel "more alive" and painstakingly pulls out details of Sitek's production and Wolfe's own vocal work. Add to that the intense personal journey that the singer-songwriter went through, and Wolfe recognises this is one of her most intimate releases so far.

"I can sense how much I'm going to learn, and grow, and change through sharing this new music with the world on tour," she shares. "I've already learned so much from this album through writing and recording it, and it's been such a wonderful guide for me. I look forward to what else it has to teach me."

Wolfe's trajectory looks set to continue along a more personal path, too, as she explains, "I already have strong ideas for my next album that I'm daydreaming about getting to explore when the time is right."

One of the most prevalent themes Wolfe hopes to communicate is that of healing.

"Music is a healer for everybody, whether you create it or not," she tells us. "I don't know that I've thought of music as my healing journey, but they do run alongside one another. I really wanted to put the healing cycle I've been living more recently into my music because it feels universal. I want others to see themselves in it and know that they're not alone."

She refers back to her getting sober, and explains that she looked to other artists and musicians who had followed a similar path, for inspiration and proof that it was possible.

Wolfe has a long path yet to tread, both musically and personally, but *She Reaches Out To She Reaches Out To She* is a stunning compilation of her deepest struggles and a more raw version of herself than she has previously presented. *Whispers In The Echo Chamber* tells of self-acceptance and cutting anything that prevents your growth, while *Self-Undoing* is a story of the moments of enchanting joy and gut-wrenching pain that Wolfe confesses she now feels more deeply than ever.

"Facing life fully present is exciting when you've spent half your life only half-present," she explains.

Many of Wolfe's vivid thoughts are already constructed for her next album and it's clear that this period of transformation and evolution is far from over.

"I know it won't always be easy, but what really *is* easy?" she ponders.

On *Place In The Sun*, she explores the idea of finding "a home" in a body that she'd been disconnected from for a long while. It suggests not only is Wolfe more grounded, but she's also more driven and determined than ever.

She Reaches Out To She Reaches Out To She is out now via Loma Vista Recordings. See chelseawolfe.com for more information.

Wolfe says she's reborn on her latest.

"There's a power in making decisions. Cutting a cord from a person, place or habit that you know is holding you back or harming you is powerful."

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When **Big Big Train**'s frontman David Longdon unexpectedly passed away in 2021, there was uncertainly over whether the band would continue. Now with an updated line-up that includes PFM's Alberto Bravin on vocals, the multinational collective are back with their 15th album. *The Likes Of Us* is for anyone who's ever felt left behind, say the band. We find out about its creation and discover which member has been know to channel his inner Bee Gee after hours.

Trainspotting: Polly Glass
Images: Massimo Goina

Into The Light

Big Big Train, L-R: Oskar Holldorff, Dave Foster, Clare Lindley, Alberto Bravin, Greg Spawton, Nick D'Virgilio, Rikard Sjöblom.

One night in Germany, during Big Big Train's last tour, Greg Spawton found himself in the middle of his own audience. Bandmate Nick D'Virgilio had suggested they spice things up by taking their usual pre-show ritual to the fans — quite literally. For Spawton, a softly spoken man with a house full of history books and a career spent largely in studios, it was the latest in a series of unexpected turns: Gigs across the world; a record deal with progressive super-label InsideOutMusic; the recruitment of a singer from Italian prog royalty PFM, who became a creative partner and friend; the death of the man he'd expected to be sharing all this with.

Come showtime, the band strode into the crowd. They had their usual huddle. They went onto the stage and the room erupted, the rebirthing power of surprise — of this multinational, multigenerational seven-piece (aged between 30 and 58), plus a brass section — laid bare.

"Suddenly the auditorium was lit up with smiling faces," Spawton remembers. "Prog is a serious business, and life is a serious business, but it can also be full of pleasure, happiness and laughter. For me, a good gig is when I can look out and see a grown man crying one minute, and then with a big smile on his face a few minutes later."

That's Big Big Train, right there — the true side, perhaps, of a band often described as 'quintessentially English'. Not that it's unfounded. There *are* Wordsworthian, pastoral sensibilities in their music. Characters teased out from British history. Strains of Genesis and The Beatles. Neo-prog flashes of Marillion, IQ and Twelfth Night, which Spawton ingested in the 80s, riding into London from Sutton Coldfield on night buses and trains — an insecure 17-year-old finding his tribe alongside Steven Wilson, Jerry Ewing and others.

On *The Likes Of Us*, their first full LP with Alberto Bravin at the microphone, they've swapped third-person storytelling for something deeply personal.

"For me, a good gig is when I can look out and see a grown man crying one minute, and then with a big smile on his face a few minutes later."

Greg Spawton

"It was surprisingly easy," Spawton nods. "I think I've kind of hidden, because we got known for storytelling songs, you end up almost adopting a mask. It just didn't feel honest to do that this time."

It's impossible to listen to *The Likes of Us* without thinking of one man: David Longdon, the charismatic frontman whose presence, flute stylings and Peter Gabriel-rivalling voice were integral to Big Big Train's sound.

Everything changed on November 20, 2021. At the time Big Big Train were riding higher than ever. *Welcome To The Planet* was ready for release. Longdon had almost completed a solo album. He was in love, and engaged. That day, in an accident that continues to shake all who hear about it, he fell down the stairs at home.

He died the next day in hospital.

"The thing with David was, he would always be there for me," Spawton says today. "Whenever we had a bad time in the band, or something went wrong, he would have an arm around my shoulder. He was a very caring human being."

For all the changes in personnel, *The Likes Of Us* breathes with the spirit of Longdon, and of other trials the band have faced; the ripples of a globally challenging period; the unforgiving death of Spawton's stepfather, as the album came together, bringing him back to his Midlands home and the memories there (captured in 17-minute epic *Beneath The Masts*); Bravin's severe experience of depression, around 2018, and the saving presence of his wife and daughter (*Love Is The Light*).

"I am *really* proud of the record," says Bravin. "I think it will be a right record for the moment that we are living, and for what happened. We tried to do our best to just carry on with the Big Big Train music. For me, as a fan, to have the privilege to sing those songs, and to write new material for the band… it is an incredible thing."

Alberto Bravin lives in a small coastal city called Trieste, next to Italy's border with Slovenia. The Bora wind blows here with a vengeance, swooping on through the Adriatic region. The white turrets of Miramare Castle look down on the Gulf of Trieste. It was in this environment that *The Likes Of Us* came to life.

"And Trieste, it's also," the ex-PFM singer/keyboardist's deep Italian tone breaks into a high, cartoonish little laugh, "it's also the city of coffee, Illy coffee, it's from Trieste! I think Greg or Nick D'Virgilio asked me, 'Do you know if there is a coffee place near the studio?' And I said, 'You have *no* idea…'"

Bespectacled and smiley, Bravin is a sweet guy with a few twists. There's a trace of Steve Hogarth in his clear yet warm, emotive baritone. He giggles easily. In the same breath he'll enthuse about Dream Theater, The Beatles, Dimmu Borgir and Nat King Cole. It's easy to picture him gelling with the eclectic Big Big Train family.

"The great thing about this band is there's absolutely no ego whatsoever," he enthuses. "I remember the guy that runs the studio here in Italy, after the recording I went there just to thank him, and he said he was blown away by the vibe in the studio."

> **"You can feel that we are there, together, and there is some vibe that you can hear."**
> **Alberto Bravin**

For 10 days in May 2023, the seven core members — Bravin, Spawton, D'Virgilio, guitarists Dave Foster and Rikard Sjöblom, keyboardist Oskar Holldorff, violinist Clare Lindley — plus longstanding engineer Rob Aubrey stayed in Trieste to record the main tracks. Ideas were bounced around in the studio and over dinners together, looking out at the sea, getting to know each other.

As Bravin explains, there's nothing on the record that can't be replicated live, without backing tracks. It all reflects a level of teamwork that few bands really nail.

"I can feel it through the album," he says, "you can feel that we are there, together, and there is some vibe that you can hear. There were no big overdubs involved, and there's stuff that just happened in the studio, and we just left it there."

Accordingly, for all the emotional weight involved, it's also an energised, vibrant affair. There are Beach Boys-style harmonies in *Skates On*. Anthony Phillips shades across the prettily melancholy *Bookmarks*. Stirring brass lines on *Light Left In The Day* that turn into bouncy keyboard wizardry, and the violin-meets-guitar rock explosion of *Oblivion*. And in *Miramare* they've created a 10-minute ode to Trieste's castle, which Bravin grew up seeing on school trips. In a nod to his more typical, history-based writing mode, Spawton ploughed through four huge books on the subject.

"I found a really obscure one published in 1950 or something," he says, "you need to just get yourself into that world. I hate shallow lyrics. I think one of the things with the greatest prog bands is that there's depth in the music and words. One of my heroes is Peter Hammill; he could write great melodies but also really deep lyrics."

Nevertheless, he admits that the real test of this new iteration of the band came outside the studio. The first gig with Bravin, Holldorff, Lindley and Foster was a "warm-up" in the English town of Eastleigh, for a small crowd of hardcore fans. For Bravin the pressure was immense. There had been some resistance to his inclusion on the grounds that he wasn't English. He was anxious to prove himself, not as a Longdon copycat but as a new voice, honouring the past and spearheading their future. In the end, he needn't have worried.

"When I finished the gig, I stepped off the stage and just fell on the floor," he laughs. "After that it just got better and better."

As touring went on the group grew closer. Spawton and Bravin, realising they were both early risers, went for walks to museums, galleries and coffee shops together. After gigs they all convened on the tour bus for drinks and karaoke renditions of Bee Gees and AC/DC classics — their bookish bass player included.

"The few people that have an impression of me is of some guy that reads books all the time, and plays bass occasionally," Spawton

Now you sea it: BBT headed to Trieste to record the main tracks.

mutters with a sly grin. "But when I've had a few beers, sometimes the inner Barry Gibb comes out…"

Still, it's taken time to reach this blissful state. He tells us it wasn't until last year's tour that he felt certain they'd been right to carry on. Longdon's fiancée, Sarah, played a huge part, reminding him that David always said if anything happened to him, they should carry the band on.

"Of course that's just talk over a beer, you never think that's going to happen in real life."

He shakes his head.

"But she reminded me."

Miles from Trieste, *The Likes Of Us* finds another foothold in Sutton Coldfield, where Spawton grew up. Two enormous radio masts loomed over the landscape. Everything in his young life happened under those masts: family events, arguments with friends, his first kiss.

During the making of the album, while his beloved stepfather was dying (following complications of a metastasized melanoma), the masts acquired a new poignancy as he drove up to see him in hospital. It fuelled the album's masterpiece, *Beneath The Masts*: 17 minutes, packed with the breadth of human experience, memory and mortality, the band in full flight.

"It was the guide-wires that hit home for me," Spawton says, "they're incredible structures, but they're tethered. And that felt like a metaphor for me, for losing my inner bearings, my roots to the Midlands."

Those roots bonded him and Longdon, both of them Midlands grammar school boys who couldn't swim. This being the 70s and 80s, such pupils were "chucked in the shallow-end". Years later they toyed with an idea for a project called 'Shallowenders'. For Spawton, a "weedy, arty kid" in school, it harks back to the vocabulary of school sports team selections, the 'extras' that nobody picked. Such terms weave into album closer *Last Eleven*, where they take on a wider significance.

"It's not like we carried this as a big bruise on our hearts or anything," he says. "It made us laugh that we were both shallowenders, but that made us think about the not-cool kids — the people that are not with the 'in' crowd."

Bravin can relate. In school he was an oddball who inhaled his parents' Beatles records, later delving into progressive rock, Norwegian black metal and Frank Sinatra.

"I was the weird metal guy," he says. "It really resonates with me. So does the title *The Likes Of Us*. I think everyone can relate."

Indeed, for all its clever composition, *The Likes Of Us*'s real strength lies in its humanity. Its ability to give a buoyant voice to the world's 'extras'. To face raw feelings like grief with hope as well as honesty.

"Quite often I would wake up in the middle of the night, and he'd be kind of with me," Spawton remembers, of the initial period after Longdon's death.

"I'd get very upset because I was on my own… I mean, everyone's on their own in the middle of the night, aren't they?"

Over time, though, he's come to think more of the times they had together. The positive experiences. His friend's smile. Lows and highs felt by the whole group as they made this music together.

"I know everyone goes, 'we pour our hearts into these things'," Spawton says, "but it genuinely was three middle-aged men sat there with tears running down our cheeks, trying to be all manly… I hope that's gone into the songs."

It's all there. The pains of recent years and others reaching further back. The lights that make it worth carrying on. It's a record for Big Big Train. For the likes of us. For the memory of David Longdon. For anyone who's ever felt left behind.

As Bravin sings in *Love Is The Light*: *'This is not the end.'*

The Likes Of Us is out now via InsideOutMusic. See www.bigbigtrain.com for more information.

Not standing still: Kyros are ever-changing, and loving it.

Liminal Space

Kyros's last full studio album was released in 2020, when the world was in a different place. With freedom to roam again, the band are back with a bang on their fourth LP, *Mannequin*, and they've got plenty to say. *Prog* catches up with the pop-friendly, shape-shifting quartet to find out more.

Words: Chris Cope
Images: Grace Hayhurst

"The realisation that we can do whatever we want and no one will stop us is kind of magical," says Kyros's Shelby Logan Warne, and who are we to disagree?

The British-based, pop-meets-prog-meets-metal quartet have furrowed a unique path of individuality in recent years, and on their fourth studio album, *Mannequin*, it appears the dial has been nudged even more. Keyboard player and vocalist Warne points to styles and sounds like new jack swing, which pop up among the 10 new retro-tinged tracks. This musical melting pot never forget about the melody, though, and that's a key part of how Kyros have created a record that could well take them far.

"I don't think we're a band that's ever been too overly conscious about our quote/unquote 'sound'," drummer Robin Johnson adds. "There's some bands who might not release a song because they're like, 'That doesn't really sound like us, we're not going to do that.' We've always been more of the mindset that if we've written it, then it sounds like us, by nature of us having written it. We're happy to let that be the guide really."

Kyros's last full original album, *Celexa Dreams*, was released in 2020, when world events meant there was no tour and no proper album cycle. Instead, they hosted a series of Isolation Session online performances. It was dubbed 'a virtual tour', but was no substitute for the real thing. This time around, however, there is "excitement in the air, for sure", Warne says, a feeling no doubt given a shot in the arm by the arrival last year of new bassist Charlie Cawood — but more on that later.

"A lot of what I was writing about was how identity is so based in theatrics, and you could put up this whole front, this fake persona."
Shelby Logan Warne

Mannequin is described as a "very vulnerable and personal" album when it comes to the lyrics, especially for Warne, a transgender woman who transitioned in recent years.

"For me, at least, a lot of what I was writing about was how identity is so based in theatrics, and you could put up this whole front, this fake persona," she says. "Obviously there's a lot that can be drawn out of that on an individual basis. Everyone has something they could pull out of that concept. But obviously for me, and the changes I've gone through in recent years, there's a lot to write about. How you can spend your whole life essentially living this fake life for it to finally bring down the curtains, and feel a great sense of relief for it."

US-based guitarist Joe E Frevola also contributed lyrics.

"The ones that I wrote on this album tended to kind of be about people, specific people in my life, who I observed something interesting in, that sparked something to write about," says Frevola. "In some ways [it's] both more personal and less silly than my previous lyrics, but also distinctly not really about myself."

Musically, the songs themselves are a playful, kaleidoscopic romp. Although for every Haken-esque dose of riffola or wacky lick there's a portion of pensive pop, or key-laden introspection.

The stonking, near-eight-minute *The End In Mind* shreds, but is swimming in atmosphere, while the catchy refrains of the peppy *Esoterica* are memorable. Kyros cite support slots with Marillion, Spock's Beard and IQ on their CV, all of which have seemingly influenced their sound, and there are whiffs of 80s Yes lurking in their synthy shimmer. Warne also points to the ethos of prog metal overlords Dream Theater as a guiding light, both in terms of technicality and songcraft.

"I've really been getting reacquainted with Dream Theater again recently in light of [Mike] Portnoy rejoining the band, and I was watching a whole load of old footage of making of albums and the guys in the studio," she says. "There is this one clip where [John] Petrucci says you can have all these tracks with a million notes and a million different time signatures, but the most important thing at the core is the song. If you don't have a song, it's pointless. That really rings true to me. I always have that in the back of my head: that mentality of you can get technical, but the song is important, at the end of the day."

Kyros's roots can be traced back more than a decade, with the group releasing their self-titled debut album in 2014 under their original name of Synaesthesia. The winds of change have rattled through them since and they've experienced a steady evolution in sound with plenty of line-up shifts, too. While *Mannequin* features the adroit chops of former bassist Peter Episcopo, Kyros now have Charlie Cawood delivering the low end.

Perhaps best known in prog circles for his involvement in acts such as Knifeworld and The Anchoress, the multi-instrumentalist teamed up with the band last year after being left impressed by a Kyros live show.

"I saw them perform last April in London before it was announced Peter was stepping away," Cawood explains on the video call with *Prog* from his home. "I really got that sense of a band coming into their own and having this real confidence and exuberance behind them. In terms of a stage presentation and how they come across live, but also in terms of the music, there was a real vibe happening. It's a similar feeling many, many years ago when I first saw Knifeworld play live, before I ended up playing in the band. I thought there was something going on there, that there was something interesting going on musically."

He stumbled across the news that Kyros were looking for a new bassist when idly scrolling on his phone in a pub garden following an Anchoress rehearsal. Although busy with many fingers in many pies, Cawood couldn't help but put himself forward to audition for the role.

"I'd already introduced my partner Jen to the band, having seen them two weeks before, and she was really into it," he adds. "We're both big Cardiacs fans, so when Shelby and Joe covered Cardiacs a couple of years ago, and did it extremely well, I was like, 'They've have got something going on.'"

With a new member in the fold, and live shows locked in the diary for April, Warne says it feels like Kyros have "hit a new stride" in recent months.

"I think Charlie has breathed new life into the band," she adds. "There's lots to be excited about."

Hopefully *Mannequin* will help them ensnare more fans, and attract more radio play if producers have their heads screwed on. Kyros's trajectory is firmly heading upwards. Refreshingly, this is a band who look set to never compromise their adventurism, regardless of how far they may reach.

"I guess it's just the natural process of what happens when you've got all of us who are into such a wide variety of styles of music," Warne replies when asked if shifting musical styles comes organically to Kyros. "Everything from Between The Buried And Me all the way through to Duran Duran. There doesn't seem to be a distinct barrier in terms of what we believe we can funnel through into Kyros. It seems to just be... you know what? If we can make it work, and if it sounds cool, let's just do it."

Mannequin is out now via White Star. See www.kyrosmusic.com for more information.

***Mannequin* is out now.**

Kyros: a big, beautiful melting pot of styles.

"I don't think we're a band that's ever been too overly conscious about our quote/unquote 'sound'."
Robin Johnson

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The Ever-evolving Symphony Of Ihsahn

As the frontman of Emperor, **Ihsahn** rose to prominence in a black metal scene laced with screaming and violence. However, his music's only grown more progressive, symphonic and melodic since. The avant-garde maestro tells *Prog* why his new, self-titled album is his most definitive and complex release yet.

Words: Matt Mills **Images:** Andy Ford

It's a frigid January when *Prog* video-calls Ihsahn. Outside, our hometown of London is enduring a particularly harsh winter, with temperatures hovering below freezing and ferocious winds only strengthening the bite of the chill in the air. However, we're on the phone with a progressive metal musician who's lived his whole life in Norway: we don't get any sympathy.

"It's around 0°C?" Ihsahn asks rhetorically, sat in his home while wearing a jet-black turtleneck jumper. "That's springtime!"

Ihsahn grew up looking the extreme potential of Norwegian nature dead in the face. When standing right outside the farm he was raised on in the rural town of Notodden, he could see snow-capped mountains and ice-cold rivers. Indoors, he spent most of his time shielded from the elements playing piano and guitar, inspired by the majesty of such metal icons as Iron Maiden and Twisted Sister, alongside swelling soundtracks composed by Jerry Goldsmith and John Williams.

"There weren't really neighbouring kids," the now 48-year-old progressive metal maverick remembers, "so music became a big part of my free time. I got my first guitar, electric organ, played the bass with my feet and would do jam sessions with myself."

Unsurprisingly, from those origins as an isolated child in middle-of-nowhere Scandinavia, Ihsahn has grown into one of the most idolised solo artists in progressive metal. After he first found notoriety as the frontman of Emperor, who redefined the typically furious black metal subgenre with soundtrack-esque keyboards and Maiden-inspired harmony, he's continued to push boundaries under his own name since 2006. And nowhere is his ever-adventurous spirit better encapsulated than on his new, eighth album, which is very deliberately and fittingly self-titled.

"It's the stuff that I feel I am best at," Ihsahn says to summarise the record.

"If you were to draw a straight line from the beginning of my career up until now, the common denominator would probably be black metal singing with dual guitars and orchestral elements. In that perspective, I thought I'd focus on those core elements."

The word 'focus' undersells it. *Ihsahn* is the most definitive yet progressive work the artist's ever done. The two-disc, 100-minute LP is a story of two halves. The first re-explores Ihsahn's classic extreme metal energy, yet proves its prog credentials with its proudly unconventional approach to melody. Rather than rely on typical rock'n'roll chord progressions, the songs eviscerate the rulebook and turn to the kind of composition that Ihsahn's film-scoring favourites preferred to use.

"I tried to focus more on the scales and harmony structures typical of film music," he explains. "That was the atmosphere I was going for. I had to take a theoretical approach to study that because, unless you've analysed it, it seems very random, especially for someone who's self-taught and comes from a very Iron Maiden, very diatonic background."

Meanwhile, *Ihsahn*'s latter half is exclusively orchestral, pulling the strings from each track on disc one and letting them consume the foreground. The result is a juxtapositional symphonic prog opus. While the 'metal' version of single *Pilgrimage To Oblivion* begins with all-guns-blazing aggro, blastbeats and screaming, its purely classical counterpart is the opposite: ominous, dynamic and tense. The melodies are inarguably the same, yet the emotional odysseys often end up being vastly different.

Tethering the halves together is an appropriately cinematic concept. Ihsahn weaves a narrative with a monomythical hero, inspired by the writing of US scholar Joseph Campbell, battling the norms of culture to forge his own identity. It's a journey starkly similar to the musician's own.

Ihsahn's always been the rebellious type. After his early days making music as a lone youngster on a farm, he met guitar player Tomas 'Samoth' Haugen aged 13 at a local blues festival. The pair bonded over an appreciation of classic black metal bands like Bathory, and formed their own to continue that lineage: Emperor.

“I tried to focus more on the scales and harmony structures typical of film music. That was the atmosphere I was going for.”

Ihsahn: from black metal to prog to who knows where?

The duo quickly got swept up in a movement of fellow Norwegian black metal artists, from Mayhem to Darkthrone, and the scene revolutionised heavy music with new forms of melody — alongside, in Emperor's case, symphonic grandeur. The movement also found controversy with its violent antics. Samoth was briefly imprisoned in 1994 for burning down a church; ex-Emperor drummer Bård 'Faust' Eithun was found guilty the same year of murdering a gay man.

Ihsahn refrained from such savage extra-curriculars, however, favouring sonic rebellion.

"My role as a part of the black metal scene is probably exaggerated, because I was the visible frontman in one of those bands," he says today. "In many ways, I was just the nerd making music."

As Emperor resumed, the frontman assumed more and more songwriting duty, to the point that their swan song, 2001's *Prometheus: The Discipline Of Fire & Demise*, was composed entirely by himself. Its complexities were deemed too esoteric and far removed from typical black metal by his bandmates, and their growing musical differences necessitated a break-up. Samoth and drummer Trym Torson stayed put in the genre with a new band, Zyklon, while Ihsahn ploughed forward with his much more progressive solo music.

"I was 15, 16 [when the band started], and we ended Emperor when I was 25, so I was still pretty young," Ihsahn reflects. "There were quite big leaps between the albums and where it was heading. You change so much: I had a need to go in a more experimental way. Listening to *Prometheus…*, because it's not that accessible, it almost seemed like a 'fuck you' of an album. I didn't want anyone else to dictate what Emperor should be like from the outside."

"My role as a part of the black metal scene is probably exaggerated, because I was the visible frontman in one of those bands. In many ways, I was just the nerd making music."

Starting with 2006's *The Adversary,* Ihsahn's solo career began to draw from much more avant-garde influences. Even more melody and accessible singing was brought in, as was spacious, catchy, Judas Priest-like riffing. Then came the ambient textures, noise, saxophone, the instruments and chords of classical music. Despite Ihsahn's ongoing fascination with aggressive sounds and screaming, he's always been a progressive adventurer. He also finds it baffling and infuriating when contemplating why his black metal peers stopped pushing against the audial grain almost 30 years ago.

"I ended up doing the most extreme music I possibly could at 16," he remembers. "We all had that, pushing [music] forward. Why would you stop pushing forward when you get an opportunity to continue? I get this a lot: 'Why do you do more experimental stuff?' I'm thinking, 'Why didn't more people continue that journey? Why did they stop at fucking 18?'"

He adds, "There's nothing wrong with it. You can't take away from Motörhead or AC/DC for being what they are. But my approach to things, I always found it much more interesting with Radiohead. Their response to *OK Computer,* one of the most successful and best rock albums ever, was *Kid A* and *Amnesiac*. I wanted that developing chameleon style."

Even though Ihsahn reformed Emperor in 2006 and the band regularly tour, they are yet to make any new music together, nor do they have any intention to. Instead, the multi-instrumentalist is much more fulfilled composing for the future than for nostalgia's sake. He's been progressing what heavy music can get away with for three decades now, yet, as his time with *Prog* comes to a close, he declares he's "only just scratching the surface" of his capabilities.

"With every album I have tried to take another step; with *Ihsahn*, I took about 10 steps," he finishes. "The biggest gratification is, closing in on 50 and having done this for a very long time, to find myself in a situation where I'm so fired-up and excited. There's a realisation that I could set the bar much higher than I did previously and work my way through it. It's just made me even more excited to do the next one."

Ihsahn is out now via Candlelight. See www.ihsahn.com for more information and the latest tour dates.

Ihsahn: why push boundaries when you can obliterate them?

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LISTEN & LEARN

With their fifth studio album, *Stay For The Ending*, **District 97** continue to blur the lines between prog and pop, and for that, they have their fans to thank. As drummer Jonathan Schang and vocalist Leslie Hunt reveal to *Prog*, much of the album's inspiration came from listening to their fans and the seasoned musings of Bill Bruford to help make their latest their most memorable yet.

Words: Phil Weller **Images:** Milk Punch Photo

It can feel a little clichéd when a band, returning with a new album, cite it as their best work yet. Yet, after a decade and a half of writing progressively angular but lofted, pop-iced compositions, Chicagoan quintet District 97 can't be accused of such lazy marketing tactics with *Stay For The Ending*. From its glinted production to Leslie Hunt's stunning vocals and the record's deft balance between accessibility and adventure, their fifth album finds the band reaching lofty new levels. So, what has changed?

"We've been listening to some of the feedback that we've gotten thus far having been together for 15 years," says Hunt. "Our fans have been excited for us to explore our less technical side more, and that's resounding feedback. It allowed us to bring in some more melodic, maybe a little more straight-ahead ideas into the music.

At their fans' request: District 97.

"Sonically, I think the record hits in a way that's a little more reminiscent of some of the other genres that we all listen to," she continues. "We were all coming in with these non-progressive rock influences, which I think is why it's pretty unique sounding. You wouldn't listen to *Stay For The Ending* and instantly rule it out from being an alternative rock or an indie record because of all the other influences that we have, and people have been really responding to that."

Their receptiveness as writers extends beyond leaning towards the clamour of their fans, too.

"All the really helpful feedback I've had from Bill Bruford over the years has seeped into my writing," says drummer Jonathan Schang. Schang's long-standing relationship with one of the most seasoned and accomplished percussionists, whose illustrious CV includes stints in Yes, King Crimson, Genesis and his boundary-pushing project, Earthworks, is only just starting to feel less surreal.

"I'm in better vocal shape than I've been in a long time. The band write songs for me to sing that are the highest quality and hugely challenging."

Leslie Hunt

"All the albums he did with Yes are just absolutely seminal for me, so I never would have thought that he'd be someone I have lunch with and talk about Brexit with. It means a lot just to have the validation of somebody that I hold in such high regard. It wasn't at the front of my mind, like, 'Write something Bill would like', but it's definitely resulted in there being more space on this album than we generally have had in the past."

With more space for their songs to breathe, District 97 have found it easier to weave in new styles and textures, taking the band to new territories.

"*Life Cycle* is my first attempt at a true ballad," says Schang. "As a band, we've had contemplative sections on other albums, but not to this extent. We've been playing *Matte Kudasai*

L-R: Jim Tashjian, Andrew Lawrence, Leslie Hunt, Tim Seisser, Jonathan Schang.

by King Crimson in our sets and so I wanted an original song that could fulfil that role. It has proggy elements to it, but it's coming from a jazz vocabulary; I actually played brushes on the drums for the first time ever in the band.

"The working title for *Crossover* was *Gamelan Song*," he continues, "as it was inspired by the Javanese gamelan style of music. That was coming through a King Crimson filter, because the songs on *Discipline* have a lot of that influence. I've always found it very striking, and it helped give the song a world music feel, which I really like."

Stay For The Ending's sonic narrative is rife with spicy, knotted turns, but the record is much more than that. For every complex arrangement is a simple, insatiable hook. That balance can help District 97 appeal to a wider audience.

"It's always been our goal to branch out beyond the prog scene," Hunt expands. "There's such an undeniable family-like and accepting audience in the prog world, and it's a scene we are super-honoured to be a part of. But we've always hoped to create something that had more crossover potential because that would be more aligned with how we identify as musicians and individuals."

In the four years since their last LP, *Screens*, the ground beneath Leslie Hunt has also shifted for the better. She feels her voice is finally at a point where she can do her bandmates' compositions justice and ice them with the grandeur they deserve.

"I'm in better vocal shape than I've been in a long time," she says. "The band write songs for me to sing that are the highest quality and hugely challenging, so I went back into voice lessons. I've also experienced a giant career shift where I'm no longer in a vocally taxing profession. I opened a music school and now I'm able to focus a lot more on the students vocally exercising in a healthy, therapeutic way. I'm no longer doing gigs on the weekend where I'm singing for five straight hours, either. So I feel really vocally awesome."

New album, *Stay For The Ending*, is out now!

"I think we also owe a lot to our producer, Noam Wallenberg," Schang adds. "He was great at getting the best performances out of Leslie, recording her in a pristine fashion and also having a good intuition for how to treat the vocals production-wise."

"He was bringing up some really cool things, like, 'I can hear you thinking on this take,'" Hunt adds. "He was really good at having me not thinking about my singing and he was able to see through very subtle inflections to be like, 'You don't sound like you believe any of this.' I love the psychology of that. It was really helpful."

The relationship between Schang as the heartbeat of the band and Hunt as the icing shouldn't be understated.

"The drums are very, very much a part of my entire interpretation of the song in my body," Hunt explains. "As a frontperson dancing, his parts have been hugely informative. My movements onstage are very much Jonathan-oriented."

For Schang, it's a cyclical relationship.

"Leslie's vocals often dictate any special extra sizzle I want to put on a certain section. They're often just as oriented to our musical shifts and the whims of whatever time signature we want to switch to. She's not just floating over the top of the intricacies of the band. She's very much a central part of the music, in the gnarly with us. I always have her voice in my head when I'm writing."

"All the really helpful feedback I've had from Bill Bruford over the years has seeped into my writing."

Jonathan Schang

The band have come a long way since their 2010 debut, *Hybrid Child*, and they've long since outgrown their roots as Jonathan Schang's creative side hustle outside of his work accompanying modern dancers and ballets across his hometown of Chicago. Now, they're in a hugely collaborative frame where everyone's input is welcome and able to spin the songs in new, unexpected directions.

"We have quite a few hooks that wouldn't exist if we all weren't open to suggestions," the vocalist believes. "With *Divided We Fall* I wrote a verse over something that was intended to be an instrumental riff, but that was the quickest that I had come up with something after I heard it; I was hearing such a distinct rhythm within it. Luckily, everybody was cool with it.

"If somebody really is married to an idea, I think it's within their rights to preserve that. But it's never a bad thing to state what you picture happening but also be open-minded to '...but check this out'."

The record benefits from that open-mindedness: confidence and cohesion flow through *Stay For The Ending*'s 10 tracks. They've never sounded more convincing and self-assured than they do here, and the fact that the album's beginnings came from listening, and learning, from their fans, as well as exploring sounds outside of the prog remit – equating to a better representation of the music tastes behind the music – makes the success of the record even sweeter.

Stay For The Ending is out now via Spirit Of Unicorn Music. See district97.net for more information.

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Family Affair

It's been four years since **Fish On Friday** released the acclaimed *Black Rain*, and, after a challenging period in his personal life, mainmain Frank Van Bogaert has returned with the heartfelt and atmospheric *8mm*. He and bassist extraordinaire Nick Beggs discuss the unexpected inspiration that led to this milestone record.

Words: Chris Wheatley **Images:** Karin Janssens

Six albums into their career, multinational prog band Fish On Friday may well have just served up their finest effort to date. *8mm* is a superbly crafted set, its expansive soundscapes shot through with beguiling hooks and sparkling melodies. Speaking from their respective homes in Belgium and England, Frank Van Bogaert (vocals, keys and guitars) and Nick Beggs (bass, Chapman Stick, vocals) are clearly excited about the band's latest project.

"It was a pleasure to make," enthuses Beggs. "It's very hard to get music over in this day and age, because everybody's making music. The media is saturated with new artists. But Fish On Friday have got a core fanbase, which seems to be growing, and I think this album will really help."

Many readers will be familiar with Beggs's work in Steven Wilson's band, Iona and Mute Gods, but his big musical break came in the 80s.

"I started playing music for fun when I was 10," the bassist recalls, "played in a band at school, but it wasn't until I met the guys that were in Art Nouveau, which went on to be Kajagoogoo, that the four of us decided we wanted to be professional musicians."

It was their biggest hit that led to Van Bogaert contacting Beggs several decades later, and it signalled the start of their creative, and very productive, relationship.

"We finished the first FoF album, *Shoot The Moon* [2010] and after that it evolved from a studio project to

more of a band," Van Bogaert explains. "I contacted Nick because we needed a bass line that was reminiscent of Kajagoogoo's *Too Shy*."

Van Bogaert's roots are in prog and he's been involved in the Belgian music scene since he was a teenager. He was just 18 when he founded the cult band, 1000 Ohm.

"I grew up listening to Yes and Genesis," says the guitarist, "then the new wave came along. By that time, we weren't technically skilled enough to play prog: we had to evolve. So we started with simple new wave."

With 1000 Ohm, Van Bogaert found himself spending more and more time behind the mixing desk. It felt like a natural step, and having a degree in electronics didn't hurt.

"The band split in '87," he continues. "I soon realised that to earn a living what you do is sit behind a desk and not on the other side."

Van Bogaert's ACE Studio, where part of *8mm* was recorded, soon became one of the busiest in the country, but the urge to create his own music never faded. Following seven solo albums by Van Bogaert, Fish On Friday emerged, and soon gained a reputation for elegantly crafted prog, with Californian guitarist Marty Townsend and Belgium-based drummer Marcus Weymaere rounding out a quartet.

A great deal of FoF's appeal stems from the quality of their songwriting. For Van Bogaert, building from firm foundations is the key.

"We could easily play the songs acoustically, with piano and upright bass, and the song would still be there," he says. "The idea is always that the song in its basic form has to be strong. Then you can make it sound big or small, whatever you feel it needs."

Supper's ready! Fish On Friday are back.

"I was a little bit afraid that we wouldn't make an album that was on par with *Black Rain*. That's why it took a bit longer, and that's why I trusted Nick in his judgement. That's why he's been crowned co-producer!"

Frank Van Bogaert

Beggs outlines the process: "Frank's the chief songwriter, he will put a thumbnail of an arrangement together, fill it out with parts from Marty or Marcus, and ask me my opinion. I'll usually throw a spanner in the works," he adds with a smile. "He'll very graciously say, 'OK, I'll take that under advisement', and rework it."

Listening to the flowing lines on *8mm*, it's not surprising to learn that Van Bogaert always begins by composing on grand piano.

"That's where all my music starts," he explains. "It's the kind of feeling you have, I can feel it upfront: this is going to be a creative day. I have to have some kind of idea about what I am going to write. If I don't, nothing will happen."

One of the most striking tracks on *8mm*, *Collateral Damage*, was inspired by the tragic and unexpected death of the bandleader's younger brother.

"He died during the Covid lockdown," reveals Van Bogaert. "If it hadn't been lockdown, he would have gone to the hospital and would still be alive."

It was while cleaning up his brother's apartment that inspiration struck.

"I found a lot of 8mm tape reels of old family movies. I started watching and I think the opening was written in less than half an hour. I've always tried to write about things that really happen around me. Most of the time emotional things."

Those emotional connections run throughout *8mm*, for example on the striking *Don't Lose Your Spirit*, which, says Van Bogaert, "is about all the wars going on right now, but I always tend to write lyrics that are open for interpretation, because I don't like them to be straight in your face — that's not my style."

A contributing factor to the current album's appeal is the presence of singer Lula Beggs, who also featured on both *Black Rain* (2020) and *Quiet Life* (2017).

"Frank asked me if I knew any good backing vocalists," recounts Nick Beggs. "I said, 'Well, there's my daughter. She's got a great soulful voice and I think she will fit in.'"

Lula's affecting vocals enhance the atmosphere on several tracks. Overall, the mix of light and shadow on the album is striking and, for FoF, there's a sense that they've captured something special.

"I said to Frank," affirms Beggs Snr, "'You know, this is the best material you've written. These songs are really strong. This is really going to make a difference.'"

Van Bogaert, too, views the record as a milestone.

"I can feel it right now," he says. "I see reactions that everybody loves the album. I feel the fanbase is really growing. When we started making it, I was a little bit afraid that we wouldn't make an album that was on par with *Black Rain*. That's why it took a bit longer, and that's why I trusted Nick in his judgement. That's why he's been crowned co-producer!"

LULA BEGGS

Above: the soulful Lula Beggs.
Below, from top: Nick Beggs, Frank Van Bogaert, Marty Townsend, Marcus Weymaere.

"Frank asked me if I knew any good backing vocalists. I said, 'Well, there's my daughter, she's got a great soulful voice and I think she will fit in.'"
Nick Beggs

Beggs's eclectic influences undoubtedly contribute to FoF's singular sound.

"My first hero was Olivia Newton-John," the bassist muses, "I was totally in love with her. And Chicory Tip. *Tubular Bells* blew my mind, and when you pick up that thread and follow it you get to prog and heavy metal. I loved Sabbath, I thought punk was incredible: The Sex Pistols, The Stranglers, The Slits... it was all informing my ear. Everything you listen to is an influence, either consciously or subconsciously."

At the mention of *Tubular Bells*, Van Bogaert nods enthusiastically.

"There's the obvious," he adds, "The Alan Parsons Project, which I've always admired, not only because of the writing of the songs, but just the technical production. I'll never forget the first time I heard their debut album, *Tales Of Mystery And Imagination*. That was a record that opened things for me that I hadn't heard before — the mix of big arrangements with pop and a sound that's a wall."

Listeners appreciative of that combination will find much to enjoy on Fish On Friday's latest, the soundscape of which is expansive and yet intimate. The music is crystal-clear, but never cold, and there's a bit of magic at play, too.

"We've got a secret tool," admits Van Bogaert. "I mix everything on an analogue desk with all analogue gear. There are a lot of people who say, 'Yeah, but I can do everything in a box on my laptop.'"

He shakes his head.

"It's not the same. It makes a difference. Going back to Alan Parsons, he still works that way also. I'm convinced it makes a difference."

Give *8mm* a listen, and it's more than likely you'll be convinced, too.

8mm is out now via Esoteric. See www.fishonfriday.be for more information.

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THE PROG INTERVIEW

CHESTER THOMPSON

Every month we get inside the mind of one of the biggest names in music. This issue it's **Chester Thompson**. The US-born percussionist got his first gig when he was just 13 and his adult CV includes stints with Frank Zappa, Weather Report and, more recently, Unitopia. He made his mark on the 70s jazz fusion scene and soon became Genesis's go-to live drummer. Now in his mid-70s, he lets us in on some trade secrets from his storied career and reveals how his accidental new album, *Wake-up Call*, came about.

Words: Mike Barnes

In 2008, drummer Chester Thompson was honoured with the Sabian Lifetime Achievement Award by American body the Percussive Arts Society to mark a career that began in Baltimore in the 60s when he was in his early teens. He honed his skills playing along to jazz records and went on to formally study flute, percussion and composition. He was about to embark upon a four-year degree course but instead joined Frank Zappa And The Mothers Of Invention in 1973, reckoning, "Well, this is what I'm trying to get ready for anyway."

Thompson played on a number of albums, including *Roxy & Elsewhere* (1974), *One Size Fits All* (1975) and *Bongo Fury* (1975). He left Zappa to join Weather Report, with whom he recorded *Black Market* (1976).

Around this time, Weather Report fan Phil Collins met with their bass guitarist, Alphonso Johnson, saying that he was looking for an American drummer to play with Genesis and invited Thompson to be their live drummer in late 1976 after *Wind And Wuthering* was recorded. This working relationship lasted more than three decades and Thompson features on their live albums from *Seconds Out* (1977) to *Live Over Europe* (2007). He also drummed on all Phil Collins' solo tours from 1982 and 2005 and plays on the 1990 live album *Serious Hits... Live!*. Thompson recorded with Steve Hackett and Tony Banks, and with Brand X's John Goodsall in the Fire Merchants, too.

Chester's new album, Wake-up Call.

Now living in Nashville, Tennessee, in addition to touring and recording, Thompson has worked as a drum teacher and is a professor at Belmont University. His current projects include The Chester Thompson Trio, whose debut album *Approved* made No.6 in the JazzWeek album charts in 2013.

He has recorded with supergroup The Fusion Syndicate and joined the Australian prog band Unitopia in 2021.

"I'm very happy to see how much the whole prog world has grown," he says. "There's some really great stuff out there."

> The song I had the most trouble with was *Afterglow*, which is probably the simplest song. Phil would always say, "No, it's not the right feel."

In 2023, Thompson released his third solo album, the melodic, funky jazz-fusion set *Wake-up Call*, which also features his son Akil on guitar. *Prog* catches up with him to look back on his career so far.

When did you first realise that you wanted to be a drummer?
My first clear memory is when I was 10 years old, which is fifth grade. But [as an adult] my mother showed me a letter that I wrote in fourth grade, and it actually outlined my whole career. It was in a kid's terms, but I dreamed of playing a big drum set and playing all over the world in big bands. I have no memory of writing it and having that big desire, but when I read it I absolutely wept.

Who were your early influences?
Jazz drummers. Max Roach, Art Blakey, Elvin Jones and, later, Tony Williams. I started very early. One of my brother's best friends was a drummer. He said, "If you want, you can always come to the house and I'd be

Frank Zappa And The Mothers Of Invention, circa 1974. L-R: Tom Fowler, Napoleon Murphy Brock, Frank Zappa, George Duke, Ruth Underwood, Chester Thompson.

RB/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

LAETITIA FORGET/DALLE/ICONICPIX

Chester Thompson during rehearsals in Belgium for Genesis's Turn It On Again Tour, June 1, 2007.

glad to give you a lesson or two". Then every morning at nine o'clock I was ringing the doorbell coming in for a lesson.

I was 13 and someone called asking if he wanted to do a job with a local soul band. By then he had committed to playing jazz and he put his hand over the receiver and asked me, "Hey, you want a gig?" And I was like, "Well, of course." And he said, "I can't do it, but I've got a drummer. He's 13, but he can do it." I didn't even have a drum set. So he took his drums down for me to do an audition with these guys. And they liked my playing. And so my family got together, and we got a used drum set and I started the next weekend and played every weekend throughout school.

How did you get to play with Frank Zappa?

A friend of mine from Baltimore, Marty Perellis, had become Frank's tour manager. He called up and said that Frank has decided the band are playing the music so perfectly, it had become a bit sterile. He was thinking of adding a second drummer, someone with, as he put it, more of a "street feel". For my audition we just jammed about an hour, going from style to style and he liked what I did. We started rehearsing and for the first couple of days we went over some simple things he'd just written. On the third day he brought the rest of the band and played through a bunch of the repertoire. It was frightening. That stuff was so difficult and so crazy, I'm thinking, "What did I get myself into?" But it was a great experience. What Frank was never known for is that he was a great teacher. You had to be at a certain level to be in his band, but he just knew how to get you to the next level.

That was my introduction to 40-hour-a-week rehearsals. My first tour with Genesis, they gave me 10 days of rehearsal and decided to take a day off because it was going so well. That was frightening, because that is not enough time to prepare for a two-and-a-half-hour show. But every Genesis tour, every Phil Collins tour, there was always a period of 40-hour-a-week rehearsals.

What prompted you to leave Zappa to join Weather Report?

Well, the very simple reason is Frank cancelled a tour. I had been in LA not quite two years, but we were always touring, so I hadn't really had a chance to meet many musicians there. So all of a sudden, I'm in this new city with no work. Alphonso Johnson, the bass player with Weather Report, had been a friend of mine for many years. He mentioned that they were in town and looking for another drummer, and wanted to know if I would be interested in coming to jam with him. And they were my very favourite band at the time.

Weather Report's *Black Market*.

I went down and it ended up being an audition, and the next week they started rehearsing for a tour. I was just so in love with that music, I let Frank know I'm gonna be moving on. And he understood, he knew it was my background. There was no animosity and we stayed friends.

Weather Report had a more organic feel than many 70s fusion bands, but then keyboardist Joe Zawinul and saxophonist Wayne Shorter had played with Miles Davis on *Bitches Brew*. As composers, they were always a bit left of centre, Wayne especially. Joe was from Vienna, Austria. He grew up doing jazz and moved to New York at a pretty young age. But he was very much taken with music from other cultures, lots of African and Indian. And he heard things in his head that were not traditional jazz.

When I first came into the band, before *Black Market*, we were talking about the drum parts that I'll put on different songs. And they would never talk in musical terms. Like once, Wayne said to me, "OK, with this

Weather Report, L-R: Wayne Shorter, Alex Acuna, Jaco Pastorius, Joe Zawinul, Chester Thompson.

ECHOES/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

CLIVE ARROWSMITH/CAMERA PRESS

Genesis in 1978. L-R: Chester Thompson, Mike Rutherford, Phil Collins, Daryl Stuermer, Tony Banks.

> Every Genesis tour, every Phil Collins tour, there was always a period of 40-hour-a-week rehearsals.

song, picture being in a desert in a caravan." That's all he said. And I immediately knew what he meant. He and Joe were big film buffs, they loved movies and they always had a very visual bent to their compositions. I think they saw them as more soundtracks than typical songs.

Phil Collins mentioned that the Genesis track *Los Endos* was inspired by Weather Report. But some British jazz-fusion musicians in the 70s were quite deferential to their American counterparts, as if they didn't feel they were quite the real deal. Did you come across that?
Well, yes, and no, I've seen it with some. But then I'd meet John Goodsall and the guys from Brand X and they certainly didn't have that feeling. Phil invited me to come along to a couple of their recording sessions and just hang out, and I was very impressed, especially with Phil's playing – and also with Genesis, with all the odd timings of the early prog stuff. Boy, just really refreshing. Not your 'typical drum part' kind of guy.

I remember a conversation with Tony Banks. He was talking about the start of the band, saying, "We weren't trying to be top-notch musicians, we just wanted to play well enough to play the songs we wrote." And one of the big differences, culturally, that I observed, if you wanted to work, unless you were in, say, California, or New York, you did cover songs, and you learned to play them exactly like that.

Coming to England, I started to recognise if you wanted to

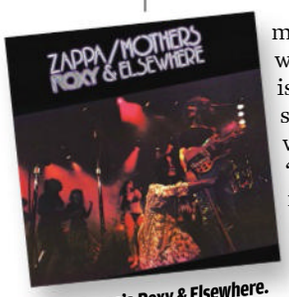
build up a following, even as a pub band, you had to have original material. I'd hear these English groups and the playing wouldn't be as pristine as, say, Miles Davis's band, but the creativity would be absolutely amazing. Here in the States, you would get these really tight bands, but not nearly as creative as what was coming out of the UK. So I think the answer may be somewhere in there.

When you joined Genesis their material was essentially very English and some songs had a kind of whimsy, which was too much even for some English people. How did you get on with that?

I've always been excited to go forward to the next thing, so I had to get used to the feel of it. It was much straighter and maybe metronomic in a way than anything I had done. I had played straight rock, but it's still a very different feel. The use of bass was probably the biggest adjustment for me. Because in everything I did, bass plays a very heavy role and with the early [Genesis] music, especially, bass didn't carry the same kind of weight. Sometimes there would be those Taurus bass pedals, so there's a drone as opposed to an actual bass line.

On *More Trouble Every Day* from Zappa's *Roxy & Elsewhere*, you and Ralph Humphrey play a syncopated two-bar drum break together a number of times during the song. We understand that Phil Collins loved that break and you played it together with Genesis?

It's at the end of *Afterglow* [on *Seconds Out*]. At the first rehearsal, Phil and I were set up before the others, and we were just jamming. He suddenly stops and goes, "How do you play the fill?"



Frank Zappa's Roxy & Elsewhere.

And I knew exactly what he was talking about. I taught it to him, as it takes two people to play it. When one person is playing toms, the other's on the bass drum and then you reverse it. I wish I had written it, but it was Ralph Humphrey.

The song I had the most trouble with was *Afterglow*, which is probably the simplest song. Phil would always say, "No, it's not the right feel." And I finally asked him, "Where are you coming from?" He said, "Well, it's like walking", and he did a walking motion. And then I smiled inside because I realised, OK, there's the problem. Where I grew up, we didn't walk like that [laughs]. I played it with a bit of swagger, a bit of swing and it needed to be really straight. And that made a big difference in how I needed to approach a lot of the other things as well.

How did you and Phil work up the material for your live drum duets?

Basically from jamming, the first couple of tours, I pretty much did most of it. Then Phil, as much as he'd played, he had not soloed as much. After that we were very much involved together. At the end of rehearsals we would sit down and jam for a couple of hours. I would get my little cassette recorder out and record it, and we'd pick out the bits we liked.

Were you basically given free rein in the songs?

Oh, absolutely. Phil would say, "These fills are part of the composition, the rest of it, you are on your own. Just do what you feel." So yeah, it was a good working relationship. I had no intention or idea that it would go on for so many years, but they kept saying, "Would you come and do it again?"

At one point, Phil said, "I think we need to bring you over early and do the recordings." But they were friends, they all lived near each other, so when they got an idea, they'd get together and get on it immediately. And by the time I could be flown in and get over jet lag, it's done already. But I knew what I signed up for so it was fine. From their perspective, fans say, "You were part of the band." I was never part of the band and the reality is that I was an employee, and what I did, I tried to do it well. And all things come to an end.

Did you want to join the band as a full-time member just before *Calling All Stations*?

When I found out that Phil was leaving I did reach out to Mike [Rutherford] and asked if they were interested in continuing that way. He was, like, a very hard-nosed, "No." They had no interest in that whatsoever. It was OK, fine. I mean, I wasn't hurting for work.

Had you hoped to play on The Last Domino Tour?

When Phil did the Motown tour in 2010, we had a really nasty falling out. I won't go into detail, but I knew that nothing would ever happen after that. I was actually very pleased to see that his son [Nic] got a chance to tour with him, as even at five years old the kid just had all the potential in the world; you could see he was a natural. That's it. I have nothing else to say on that.

> "I'm very happy to see how much the whole prog world has grown. There's some really great stuff out there."

You've toured with all sorts of bands. Do any memories particularly stand out?

I did a European tour with The Bee Gees [in 1989] in between Genesis tours. In the States they got a bad rap with the disco thing but they were still writing incredible songs and it was a real pleasure to work with them. The

Good times: Chester Thompson and Phil Collins in 2007.

DALLE / AVALON

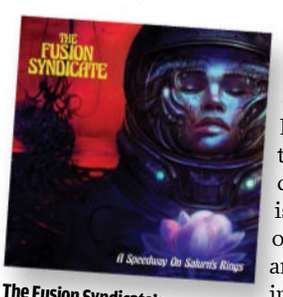
Still killing it: Chester onstage with Unitopia.

PRESS/GIOVANNI CIONCI

Santana thing was a lot of fun; that was actually a package tour with Bob Dylan. Prior to that I had recorded an album with Santana as well [*Beyond Appearances*, 1985]. Alphonso Johnson was on bass and there were two Chester Thompsons in the band – the keyboard player had the same name!

The Fusion Syndicate are an unusual project. On the 2023 album *A Speedway On Saturn's Rings* you recorded one track, *Io* with Rick Wakeman, and another with Jah Wobble on bass...

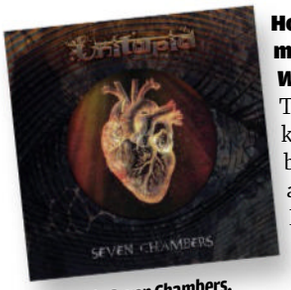
It's never really been a band. All of the basic tracks were done in two days by me and a bass player in LA, knowing that they would bring in guest artists on different tracks, including several different drummers: a fusion all-stars, for lack of a better term. I don't like to listen to my playing that much, so I still haven't heard all of it. I've done several things for them [Cleopatra Records and sub-label Purple Pyramid] where they will put together a fusion or prog project. I ended up playing on a King Crimson tribute [*Schizoid Dimension*] as well.



The Fusion Syndicate's *A Speedway On Saturn's Rings*.

And you and Alphonso Johnson joined Unitopia and played on last year's *Seven Chambers*.

Man, I really enjoy that band. We did a European tour in September and we're hoping to be able to book another tour soon. They took a hiatus from recording and touring [from 2014-2021]. The main two guys, Sean Timms and Mark Trueack, have added a very good guitarist, John Greenwood, who's a retired surgeon, actually. They've been doing most of the writing, so we're all throwing our bits in as we go. For the next one they want to really co-write it; trouble is, you got a couple of guys in Australia and Mark now lives in Thailand. We're all over the map [laughs].



Unitopia's Seven Chambers.

How did you put the music together for *Wake-up Call*?

The bass and keyboard player and bass player [Michiko and Robert 'Peewee' Hill], were in the first band I ever had. We just used my name as we could never decide on a name. Unfortunately, the band never got to be what it could have been, but we all stayed close. The crazy part is we haven't played together in 30 years, but the feeling we had when we played together is still there.

I spoke with them at the beginning of lockdown. They have a home studio and were saying, "Nobody's booking the studio so we're just sitting around jamming with the drum machine." And my comment was, "No, don't do that. Let me send you something to jam with." I laid down a drum track, not quite five minutes, and I threw in some fills. When I'm jamming alone, I'm hearing melodies in my head. They wrote around it and sent it back to me and it totally blew my mind. I was like, "You gotta be kidding me!" And their comment was very flattering. They said, "We just went where you led it." But then we put a lot of time together back in the day. It stretched out for about a year with them writing around the drum tracks I sent. So then we started adding in some saxophones and guitars.

How often do you practise?

If I haven't played in three or four days I start getting really antsy. For me, at this point in life, some of the practice is to not lose what I've had. I've slowed down a bit from when I was 25-30, but there's not much of it I can't do. I'm grateful for that and I want it to be crisp, I want it to be what I intend.

But I'm always looking to learn new stuff. I still believe very much in practising music, just like they always speak of practising medicine and practising law. You practise music because you will never know everything. And the moment you think you do, you're finished.

Wake Up Call is out now via Prograck Essentials. See chesterthompson.com for more information.

IT BITES FD

What's in a name? Great British prog maverick Francis Dunnery reconnects with his past and moves forward at the same time.

Words: Gary Mackenzie **Illustration:** Michael Robinson

When It Bites folded in 1990, Francis Dunnery quickly left his own past behind him. But this supremely gifted, mercurial and sometimes perplexing musician's initial dismissiveness and coolness towards his former band didn't last. A brief reunion in 2003 came to nothing, leaving his ex-bandmates to continue with replacement singer John Mitchell, but Dunnery began introducing their songs into his solo sets and, from 2009's *There's A Whole New World* onwards, sporadically re-recorded their songs under his own name.

With the future of the Mitchell-fronted It Bites unclear, a gap opened up in the market, to be filled by It Bites FD. They made their recorded debut on 2023's *Live From The Black Country* double live album, though Dunnery has since dispensed with all of the musicians who played on that record except bassist Paul Brown, giving no explanation as to why.

Now comes *Return To Natural*, Dunnery's first studio album under the It Bites name — albeit in modified form — in 35 years. Featuring alongside Brown, keyboard player Tony Turrell, ex-Zappa/Allan Holdsworth drummer Chad Wackerman and long-time collaborator Dave McCraken on "ambience", this new venture could disappoint anyone expecting the edginess and crafty bombast of the original incarnation. Now in his 60s rather than his 20s, and steeped in the blues, R&B, Americana and jazz influences of his adopted homeland of America, the frontman has operated primarily as a solo artist for the past three decades, only needing to please himself, and this is his vision of what his 21st-century It Bites should sound like. Yet for anyone not hung up on the music Dunnery once made, it's a more than worthwhile listen.

It's telling that the first track, *Turning The Sky Into Fire*, is slow, dreamy and understated, very far indeed from the dynamic punch and exuberance of It Bites album openers of yore like *Midnight* and *I Got You Eating Out Of My Hand*. Underpinned by a simple yet entrancing keyboard refrain, the band ease in and settle on a gently seductive groove. 'Understated' seems to be something of a watchword throughout much of the album with space, atmosphere and texture reigning supreme.

Return To Natural

FRANCISDUNNERY.COM

"It's not the It Bites of old, but it's a quality album from a class act."

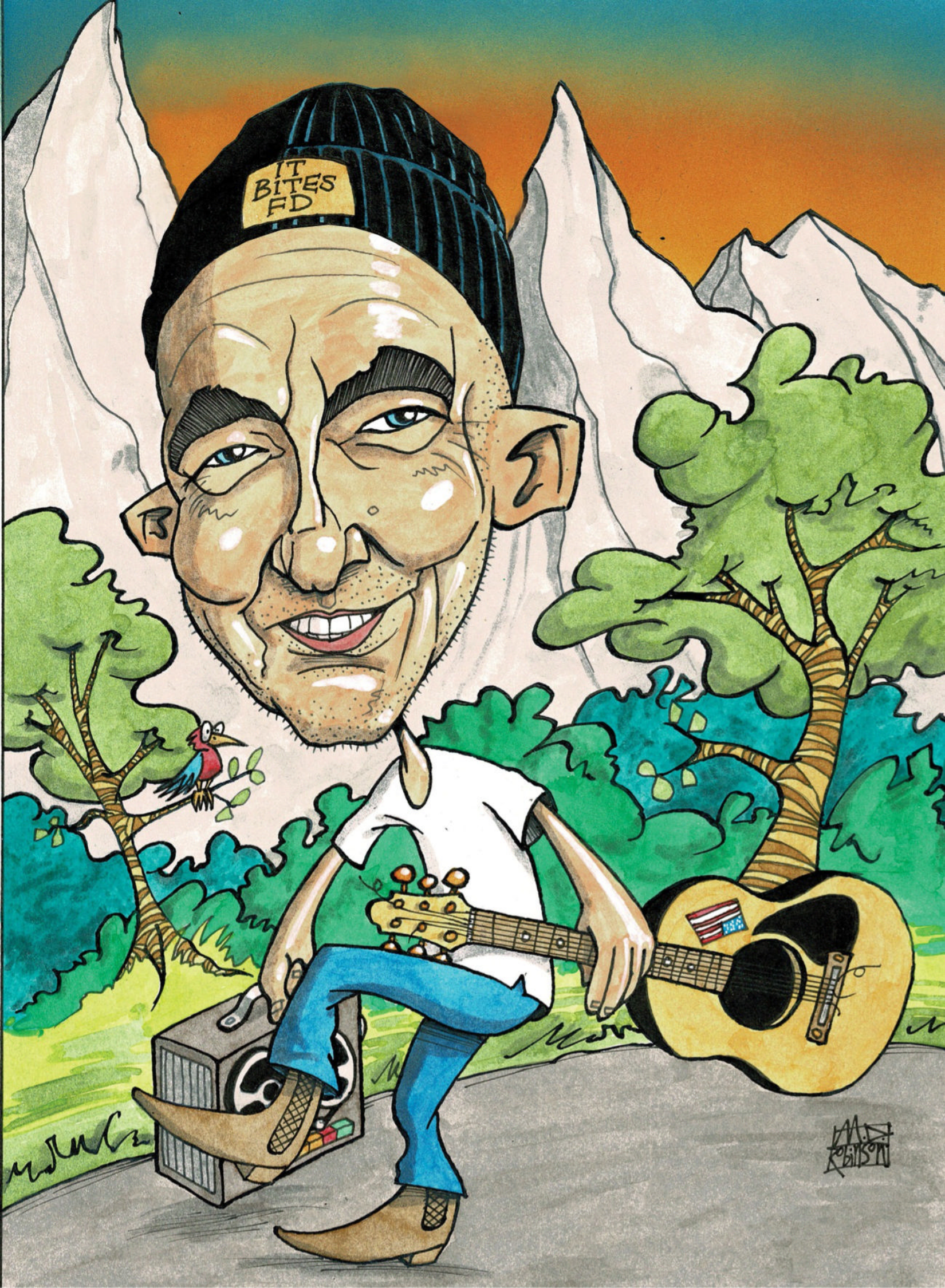
Laid down in a week at Rockfield Studios, the album is kept old-school and natural, with Dunnery recording to tape without any digital enhancement. Purchasers of *Return To Natural* on vinyl, to be cut direct from the master, will own a wholly analogue record. This eschewing of the artificial is one of the record's themes, notably on the title track, which comments on humanity's despoiling of the environment and being true to our inherent natures. It includes a funky slow build over a marimba-like figure, and Dunnery takes one of many tasteful guitar solos here.

Elsewhere *Magdalena* marries a classic Dunnery guitar top line to some mid-paced poppy Americana and an almost-too-simple chorus that's hard to resist singing along to, and *While We Were Sleeping* features sultry smooth Latin-tinged funk peppered with delicate guitar. Fretboard pyrotechnics towards the end collide with playful drum flexing from Wackerman.

There's one track, in particular, that most immediately resembles the It Bites of old and that's *Man Overboard*. The song's reggae-tinged verses provide a foundation for Dunnery's part-snarled, part-slurred lyrics and a rousing chorus that cries desperation while lodging solidly in the brain. Although operating vocally at a slightly lower register now — *'I can't sing as high as I used to sing when I was high and younger'* he wryly intones at one point — Dunnery still has the same unmistakable inflections and ability to craft beguiling melodies and phrasing. Interestingly, it's not a new song at all but a reworked track from Dunnery's mammoth collection, *The Big Purple Castle*, originally released in 2021.

The closest he comes to pure prog here is closer *We're Going To Clean The Sea*. Its near-10-minute duration is constructed from numerous sections, running the gamut from Hackett-esque pastoral guitar picking to warm up-tempo bluesy shuffles via driving, frantic indie rock and a lengthy section that plays around with various feels in 7/8 (the only odd time signature section on the entire album). It finally closes on a poignant, aching refrain.

There are some beautiful tunes here and many moments redolent of what made It Bites so very special, but it also underlines that the extent to which other members of the original band shaped their sound, arrangements and character was clearly not insignificant. For all that, *Return To Natural* easily ranks with some of Dunnery's best solo work. It's not the It Bites of old, but it's a quality album from a class act, even if expectation management is advised for old-school fans.


IT
BITES
FD

ELBOW

Audio Vertigo POLYDOR

The Bury band dream harder, ensuring their 10th LP is special.

As Elbow's frontman Guy Garvey and his band of brothers push the envelope on their dizzyingly diverse 10th album, there's no mistaking the ambition afoot. The loping gait that propels *Things I've Been Telling Myself For Years*; the Fela Kuti-ish exoticism of *Lover's Leap*; the progressive soul vibes *Her To The Earth* — all of these signal a band vacating their comfort zone to dazzling effect.

> **Like all the best acts, Elbow know they need to evolve.**

Garvey's poetic lyrics and emotive, warm-hug-of-a-voice are the threads that bind, his unvarnished Mancunian vowels still pancake-flat. Even *Knife Fight*, a tale of a real-life skirmish he witnessed in Morocco, manages to sound welcoming and inclusive, its outro hook comprised of the joyful chant, *'Hallelujah, buy us a pint!' Balu*, meanwhile, is named after *The Jungle Book*'s affable cartoon bear and was part inspired by the singer's nephew, whose nickname is Balu. It's no surprise that Garvey — something of a ursine character himself — finds palpable joy in the song's energising lattice of fizzing synths.

Fascinatingly, *Audio Vertigo* also leaves in a couple of brief segue tracks, which offer fly-on-the-wall access to Elbow's engine room. On (*Where Is It?)* we hear Garvey in human beatbox mode as he flags up different rhythms that might anchor its guitar riff — *'Give it fat, wide wheels!'* he enthuses — while *Embers Of Day* is a chiming electric guitar-led evocation of day's-end possibility, and is over in just 38 seconds. *Poker Face*, too, is a brief, beautifully lopsided-sounding thing, its sticky groove seemingly documenting some of the more excessive nights of Garvey's youth. *'Cokey chokey one for the road,'* he sings.

Thematically, the album also explores star-crossed lovers, toxic relationships, and the internet as an all-consuming black hole. Garvey is at his most incisive and articulate on the aforementioned *Things I've Been Telling Myself For Years*. A song about procrastination, self-delusion and the protective bubble of fame, it includes the confession: *'I haven't paid for cabs or beers, or met a cunt in 20 years.'* But even as Garvey approaches national treasure status he seems self-aware and self-mocking enough to carry that weight.

Audio Vertigo is full of invention and humanity. Whether it can take its place in the nation's hearts in the way *One Day Like This* did back in 2011 remains to be seen, but, like all the best acts, Elbow know they need to evolve, and *Audio Vertigo* sees them do so in great style. Why channel such diversity, potentially shedding some of their less forward-thinking and adaptable fans? "Because its fun," they say. If only more bands were willing to take such risks.

JAMES MCNAIR

BARDIC DEPTHS

What We Really Like In Stories BARDIC DEPTHS

The Depths hit the heights on bookish third album.

With *What We Really Like In Stories*, Bardic Depths have used time-honoured 70s prog influences to create a gorgeous, classic-sounding melodic album, with spookily atmospheric, immaculately plucked 12-strings and warm Mellotron sounds abounding.

Once again they've collaborated with historian-turned-lyricist Bradley Birzer, who bases the words on his book *Mythic Realms*, a series of literary essays that analyse authors from Tolkien to Stephen King. The stately, sprightly title track combines Howe-ish trills and runs with buzzy synth lines. Saxophonist/clarinettist Peter Jones steps up to the mic to provide warm, very English tones discussing time travel and space. On *The Feast Is Over*, regular vocalist and mainman Dave Bandanna uses his compelling, folky tones to somehow give a celebratory feel to a song referencing the suicide note of *Conan The Barbarian* creator Robert E Howard. The Ray Bradbury-inspired *You've Written Poetry* is one of several tracks to feature a fabulously Floydian sax break from Jones.

An intriguing concept, well realised musically, with some really great storytelling. Literally. **PGI**

DANIEL BIRO

Hotel Erika SARGASSO

Ambient specialist's soundscapes show water-treading tendencies.

South African-born, French-raised, London-based Daniel Biro is a seasoned composer of soundtracks and scores invariably created on vintage analogue synths and Rhodes piano, which may be why *Hotel Erika* feels like the contents of lost tapes retrieved from down the back of a console in Tangerine Dream or Mike Oldfield's studio.

The noodles are endlessly looping, as if in an extended scene of someone stepping into a futuristic laboratory in a sci-fi movie. But too often they lack distinctive character. Intermittently they threaten to turn into something more immersive, as when eerie Theremin-like wobbles punctuate *Triglav*, accompanied by languidly tinkling electric piano notes, or when refracted rays of electronica glimmer on the surface of *Sava* as distant bells chime.

More engaging are the shrieking, jump-scare notes on *Incubus* as they rise in intensity above the moody electronic mist. The slow pounding of bass drum that underpins the Moog-y melancholia of *Sandor's Dream* offers further hints of drama afoot, but it's too little, too late to save the album as a whole from constituting a rather underwhelming affair. **JS**

CAN

Live In Paris 1973 MUTE

The first of the band's archival live recordings to feature late singer Damo Suzuki.

The latest in the run, Can's retrospective live releases finds the clock winding back to hit the mother lode with the self-explanatory *Live In Paris 1973*. The first in the series to feature frontman Damo Suzuki – who would quit the band soon afterwards – this astonishing recording finds the kosmische pioneers on jaw-dropping form at the famed L'Olympia theatre.

While the album's live predecessors would find snippets of their recorded work weaving their way in and out of their largely improvised performances, here their songs act as a launchpad to blast off into orbit and beyond. Be it Holger Czukay's propulsive bass, Jaki Liebezeit's precise yet funky drumming or Irmin Schmidt's swirling keyboards, each of the players have room to manoeuvre, but Michael Karoli's singing guitar is remarkable throughout. And marshalling it all is Suzuki, a near-surrealist ringmaster.

As evidenced by the delirious applause at the end of 36-minute opener *Paris 73 Ein*, Can were no mere cult concern playing to a few stoned hippies, but a cultural force that crossed borders. That they continued to do so over the decades cements their justifiably legendary status. **JM**

THE CHRONICLES OF FATHER ROBIN

The Songs & Tales Of Airoea - Book 3: Magical Chronicle (Ascension) KARISMA

Norwegian supergroup complete epic pastoral prog trilogy.

The Chronicles Of Father Robin were formed at school in the early 1990s by future members of Wobbler, Tusmørke, Jordsjø and The Samuel Jackson Five, but only now have the songs they've nurtured on and off ever since finally seen the light of day.

That long gestation period didn't stop the first two parts of this fantasy-themed trilogy from being performed with arresting gusto, particularly on the more upbeat passages. Here it's the dreamier fare that is most impressive as they conclude the titular character's Tolkien-esque pilgrimage. *Skyslumber*'s bucolic glide is enhanced by the male-female vocal combination of Andreas Prestmo and Aleksandra Morozova, before the blissful *Cloudship* is gilded with Yes-style harmonies.

Occasionally they have a habit of hobbling songs with over-complicated time signatures and overwrought instrumental flourishes, but when their instinct towards energised hard rock re-emerges on tracks such as *Empress Of The Sun*, or they lift the mood with a sun-dappled slice of Canterburian folk-pop on *Lost In The Palace Gardens*, it's an intoxicating experience. **JS**

CLOUD PEOPLE

Simulacra APOLLON

Synth-driven sextet get lost in conspiracy theories on debut album.

An instrumental concept album on the theme of conspiracy theories? Norwegian sextet Cloud People have fashioned that very thing. And with the witterings of the tinfoil hat brigade reaching epidemic proportions in the wake of the internet rabbit holes that became so very popular during the pandemic, the release of the *Simulacra* couldn't be better timed.

Ostensibly a synth-based project, Cloud People are clearly having a lot of fun knocking about the themes of smoke and mirrors at the highest levels. *Chemtrails* and *Simulation* evoke John Carpenter's early soundtracks, albeit with an extra squelch and bounce to the ounce and their immediacy set the tone for what's to come. Elsewhere, *Pandora's Hoax* makes a number of stylistic twists and turns that veer from synthesised pumps to spooky sweeps and creepy guitars.

Less successful is *Area 91*, on which a fake voice-over becomes obstructive to the degree that the music takes second place to a narrative that would've been guessed at anyway. Similarly, *Hollow Moon*'s saxophone is laid on a little too thickly. Yet for all that, the paranoia throughout is good fun. **JM**

GUILLOTINE SPRING

Eclosion GUILLOTINESPRING.BANDCAMP.COM

Razor-edged electric folk from former Galley Beggar duo.

Guillotine Spring know the importance of the drone. While the UK four-piece draw from the same well of late 60s/early 70s folk-rock influences as singer Maria O'Donnell and guitarist Mat Fowler's previous band, the much-missed Galley Beggar, the unearthly, indefinable sonic thread that runs through their songs connects them as much with the likes of The Velvet Underground and modern-day Irish folk boundary-pushers Lankum as it does Pentangle or Trees.

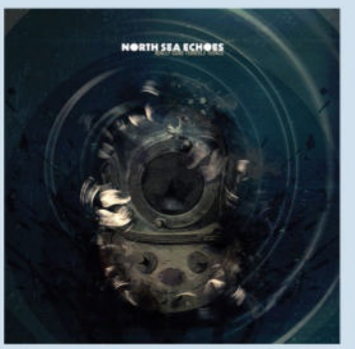
Their debut album is equally sharp and mesmerising. It's built around the interplay between O'Donnell's strident yet crystal-clear voice and Fowler's shape-shifting guitar, the two instruments wrapping themselves around each other on the title track and *In Your Garden* (though Kirsteen Bristow's consistently inventive drumming plays a huge part in the Guillotine Spring sound). Elsewhere, *Whispers* is haunting and unsettling, while a cover of troubled US folk singer Jackson C Frank's *Forest Of Eden* taps into the strange fragility of the original.

Like the great bands who inspired them, Guillotine Spring have created their own world: self-contained, strange, but always hypnotic. **DEV**

NORTH SEA ECHOES

Really Good Terrible Things METAL BLADE

Fates Warning men ditch the prog metal and get their gloom on.



There's no sense of Fates Warning vocalist Ray Alder and guitarist Jim Matheos taking a busman's holiday with their first album under the guise of North Sea Echoes. Following Alder's revelation last year that the prog-metal mainstays would no longer record and release new material, fans might be hoping that this new partnership could fill that vacancy in the musical firmament. However, this is an animal of a very different stripe; North Sea Echoes feels much closer to the vibe of Matheos's Tuesday The Sky project from 2021 than anything from their main band.

> **Abandon expectations of a surrogate Fates Warning.**

Really Good Terrible Things is suffused with melancholy and longing. Alder has always possessed a talent for reflection and emotional self-examination as a lyricist, qualities evinced on his two recent solo releases, *What The Water Wants* and *II*. Where those records put his musings against a backdrop of heavy riffs, this time Alder pours out his thoughts and feelings over ambient soundscapes and acoustic guitar. Matheos's playing is sparse, subtle, and restrained. There are no shred workouts to stamp this as a record by a guitarist intended for guitar players. The solo in *Touch The Sky* is refined and unadorned, allowing Matheos to demonstrate his talent for expressing the greatest sensitivity to meet the demands of the music.

Most of the tracks feature programmed percussion that percolates in the background, although Gunnar Olsen from Puscifer plays drums on two tracks — *Empty* and *Throwing Stones*. The former is one of a few moments where the album veers towards something heavier and rockier, recalling the industrial gloom of Nine Inch Nails, qualities amplified by Olsen's punchy drumming. Yet it's still a sombre listen, carried on a dark, pulsing synth undercurrent.

Without the need to power through a wall of distorted guitars and metal riffage, Alder shows his range, bringing an impressively delicate touch to the elegant ballad *Unmoved* as he plaintively declares, *'I'm tired of waiting here for the world to change every year.'* That sense of yearning and of emotions left unresolved runs throughout the lyrics. *'I know sometimes I feel like we're walking around in circles endlessly,'* he sings in *Throwing Stones*. *The Mission* provides a shift in mood at the midpoint with a dance-pop beat, but the album closes with *No Maps*, reaching for a sense of home and safety. North Sea Echoes represent a commendable and bold venture for both Alder and Matheos. Abandon any expectations of a surrogate Fates Warning and embrace the ennui. It might be downbeat, but emotions run strong in *Really Good Terrible Things'* slowly churning depths.

DAVID WEST

SLEEPMAKESWAVES

It's Here, But I Have No Names For It BIRD'S ROBE RECORDS

Aussie quartet deliver punch and post-rock nuance in equal measure.

In post-rock, size is everything, and Australians Sleepmakeswaves waste no time in showing off the seismic, speaker-rattling production of their fifth album. Continuing a trend started with 2020's *These Are Not Your Dreams*, the Sydney group have dispensed with an external producer, seeing external influences as a distraction rather than a benefit.

> **It showcases the band at their fluid best.**

Celebrating 18 years of existence in 2024, the band believe their biggest achievement to date is to have simply "endured" a near-two-decade adventure that's been marred by line-up changes, gear theft, failed relationships and crashing computers. While that emphasises resilience, it detracts from an art form they have so diligently made their own.

They've always taken the predominantly instrumental, reverb-drenched hypnotism of post-rock down more aggressive pathways than many of their peers. Yet they've also drawn a parallel tranquillity alongside that grit for a broad sonic and emotional spectrum and this latest album proves that, showcasing the band at their fluid best.

Super Realm Park attests to that light and shade aesthetic, spinning into life with a positive, danceable keyboard refrain punctuated by a grinding turnaround from guitarist Otto Wicks-Green. Yet, as action-packed as it is, with Alex Wilson's loud and growling bass lines gleefully hurling themselves into every pocket of space available, it also holds its breath for two well-crafted dips. The first is all acoustic guitars and watery keyboard undercurrents as the band catch their breath. The second is led by a piano motif that's accompanied by whirring feedback. Both sections consequently make the minefield that marks the journey from A to B even more deadly.

Elsewhere, *Ritual Control* delivers supercharged alt rock aesthetics in one moment and soars over vivid, ice-capped landscapes in the next. *Black Paradise* offers enchanted clean guitars and grandiose string arrangements across a song that glides slowly but surely towards its lofty crescendo. When it's done with its relentless rhythmic attack, *Terror Future* brings in a powerful vocal refrain to blanket its muscular-yet-jagged outro, before counterbalancing its thunder with the post-storm calm of its title track. It benefits from being dialled back, leaving acres of space for Wicks-Green's weeping guitar lines to pour out of the mix. The pair of songs finds the band at their diverse and ever-interesting best. With *It's Here...*, Sleepmakeswaves are continuing to separate themselves from the post-rock pack, delivering their own twist on the genre with bucketloads of aplomb.

PHIL WELLER

STUART HAMM

Hold Fast GUITAR ONE RECORDS

US bass virtuoso's determinedly proggy outing covers varied musical ground.

Best known as bassist and collaborator with Steve Vai and Joe Satriani, as well as a fusion-leaning solo artist in his own right, Stu Hamm decided to put a more rock and prog-centred album together as the world returned to normality, bringing like-minded muso friends on board.

Hold Fast's eight tracks are split between instrumental and vocal songs. *To Mainframe!* marries an almost space-rock vibe to big anthemic keyboard hooks, while *Bad Year* features vocalist Randy McStine turning in some dark verses and swaggering chorus lines. Elsewhere, *Infinite* builds a fragile, slightly otherworldly tune entirely on bass and McStine's voice, while the title track is the nearest in form to classic jazz fusion, underlining yet again what serious jazz chops guesting Testament guitarist Alex Skolnick possesses. An irreverent instrumental cover of Queen's *We Will Rock You* demonstrates what a big 70s rock anthem sounds like when given the fusion-meets-reggae treatment.

Hamm's playing throughout is both technically astute and enormously tasteful. As an album, *Hold Fast* isn't revolutionary or groundbreaking, but it is hugely enjoyable. **GMM**

LUCIFER WAS

Ein Fix Ferdig Mann APOLLON

Norwegian veterans channel their 70s rock roots.

Good things come to those who wait. Initially active in the early 70s, Lucifer Was finally released their debut album in 1997, when Swedish label Record Heaven convinced them to record decades-old material that had only ever been heard live. The band embraced the opportunity and are now on their eighth studio album. It's also the first delivered in their native Norwegian, which either adds to its charm or makes it slightly less accessible, depending on the listener's linguistic capabilities.

There's certainly a surfeit of charm on display, with the sound still harking back to the band's early days. There's proto-metal reminiscent of Atomic Rooster and near-namesake Lucifer's Friend in the dramatic stabs of *Krig I Opne Landskap* and *Ei Gåte*. Elsewhere there are pure power ballads, a slice of atmospheric Nordic folk in *Når Natta Kjem Og Tek Meg* and organ- and flute-imbued hard rock thumpers that recall Uriah Heep and Jethro Tull.

While there isn't much here that fans won't have heard before, Lucifer Was do add their own quirks and personality, with songs that occasionally twist conventions to make the familiar sound fun and fresh. **PT**

MOUNTAIN CALLER

Chronicle II: Hypergenesis CHURCH ROAD RECORDS

Instrumental trio return with an epic prog-metal odyssey.

In the words of grandmothers everywhere: my, haven't you grown? Four years after their 2020 debut album, *Chronicle I: The Truthseeker*, Mountain Caller return bigger, stronger, and flush with confidence to continue their explorations of the fertile realms of prog metal, doom and post-rock.

Chronicle II possesses deeper, warmer tones without sacrificing the sonic impact and hefty riffage of the debut, although the biggest surprise is the revelation of bassist El Reeves' singing voice on *Dead Language*, momentarily breaking with their instrumental format. The arrangements are rich in colour and detail. Guitar melodies and growling bass lines dance and weave around one another with a nimbleness that defies the gravity-bending density of the riffs, while drums move in tight synchronicity to lend extra weight to the swaggering heave of *Into The Hazel Woods*. They do shifting dynamics well too. *March Of The Göll*, named after a valkyrie from Norse mythology, is light and gentle, while the titular *Hypergenesis* is a prog metal codex, packed with stimulating ideas to dissect and digest. Dive in and be swept away. **DW**

BILL NELSON

Starlight Stories SONOLUXE

Haunting songs and instrumentals based on children's storybooks.

When Bill Nelson was working on 2023's *All The Fun Of The Fair* album, he also recorded these 15 tracks, which form a nostalgic journey back to his childhood when he would read his mother's illustrated books from the 1920s, such as *The Golden Wonder Book For Children*. It's unabashedly nostalgic – the cover shows a boy gazing up at the night sky – but it works so well precisely because it's not the sort of winsome musical watercolour all that might suggest.

While its sister album is more outward looking, more rock based, *Starlight Stories* evokes a sense of childhood wonder but in a primary-coloured way. On *A Wide Open Window (With A View Of The Stars)* Nelson uses backwards guitar, piano, programmed beats and gloopy electronics that sound like someone trying to tune in an old radio set. He has created a shifting sound world and one that keeps on throwing up surprises. *Ghosts Of Ancient Houses* starts off strange and shadowy, Nelson's rather tremulous vocals reminiscent of David Bowie on his last albums, but his lead playing spirals skywards towards the close, and *The Doctor Was An Alchemist* is built on anthemic guitar melodies. **MB**

OBSERVERS

The Age Of The Machine Entities SPECTRA RECORDS

Glorious instrumental reimagining of *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

Observers mastermind Martin Kennedy is best known for his musical lightness of touch with Australian electronic/ambient psychedelicists All India Radio. But here he's embarked on an entirely different trip, specifically one inspired by *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

At odds with his day job, Kennedy's vision of Stanley Kubrick's sci-fi masterpiece is frequently heavier than a collapsing black hole. *Frank Poole's Dream* and *Into The Eye* feature a teeth-rattling crunch that's as heavy as anything served up by the similarly intergalactically minded prog metal travellers Gojira. Conversely, there are moments of beautiful stillness. Kennedy's use of space – excuse the pun – means there are moments here for quiet reflection, to idle and watch a spray of stars go gliding by, notably during the quiet drone of *Metaphor II* and the colourful and radiant guitar work out that features on *The Star Child*. He even pays tribute to the pioneers of inner and outer space themselves, with a take on Pink Floyd's *The Narrow Way Part II*, from the latter's wonderfully spangled *Ummagumma* album. What a long, strange trip it is. **PW**

MATT PAGE

Apocalypse Garden ELECTRIC SLEEP RECORDS

Striking yet introspective solo debut from Dream The Electric Sleep man.

Kentucky prog trio Dream The Electric Sleep are partly defined by frontman Matt Page's soothing voice and contemplative songwriting. His very first solo album sounds like what would happen if his regular band doubled down on the more frictionless side of their work.

With its bright harmonies, life-affirming lyrics and full-bodied arrangements, opener *The Turning* exudes Page's natural charm and mainstream appeal. The same holds true for lively rockers *Chasing The Sun* and *Waiting For A Return*, yet the LP is often at its most gratifying when it veers off the beaten path. Whether it's the horns and electronic beats of *Feet Of Crows*, the quirky *Has A Thawing Come Here* or the odd rhythms of *Massive Stars*, Page frequently channels the graceful adventurousness of 80s Peter Gabriel.

Acoustic ballads *Know You Better* and *Winter Window* add soft, heartfelt touches to the experience, too, rounding out a collection that offers distinctive blends of classic Americana, progressive pop and alternative rock. Fans of DTES – as well as of singer-songwriter albums in general – should definitely seek it out. **JMB**

VENNART

Forgiveness & The Grain VENNART.BANDCAMP.COM

Ex-Oceansize man brings the noise back on fourth solo album.

In the decade-plus since Oceansize sank beneath the waves, their former frontman Mike Vennart has kept himself pretty busy, either side of his day (and night) job as touring guitarist with Biffy Clyro.

> **Independence allows Vennart to follow his muse.**

The pandemic didn't do much to slow the pace of his productivity, with 2020's *In The Dead, Dead Wood* followed by 2022's live-in-the-studio recording *CGI Metals OST*. Then, the same year, while other musicians might have spent the long hours travelling across the US cultivating unhealthy extra-curricular habits, he took the opportunity on Biffy tours to record 2022's improvised *Backseat Hards* on an electro-acoustic guitar. That was followed last year by *Rivers Of Heresy*, the debut release by Empire State Bastard, his extreme metal project with Biffy's Simon Neil.

Forgiveness & The Grain finds him back in the studio for the fourth long player under the Vennart monicker, and many of these songs veer away from the more conventional song structures of *In The Dead, Dead Wood*. A self-produced, self-played and self-released affair, that independence allows him to follow his muse as ruminatively as he likes. Fans of slow-building, increasingly enveloping noisescapes will hear echoes of Mogwai's journeys into their own self-sculpted sonic cave networks on *Luminous Target* and *Fractal*'s shoey meditations, except Vennart ends up howling at the heavens somewhere within the void. *RU The Future* recalls Talk Talk turning their hands to dream pop while Doves add a fog-wreathed sense of yearning. Elsewhere, *Chapter X Whereupon I Immediately Did Nothing* recalls Radiohead's agitated, polyrhythm-framed ennui repurposed by Elbow, then at other points Vennart's love of the Cardiacs is evident in shards of angular jazz metal thrown into the mix.

And yet there's a sense of unfinished business about some of these tracks; thoughts and ideas put down but needing a producer or bandmate or songwriting partner to help shape them more fully. Or maybe a couple more hooks or prominent musical motifs here and there to prevent our attention wandering. When Vennart leans back into a more structured style on *Casino*, it's more gripping. A love-lorn ballad is gracefully decorated with glockenspiel-like electric piano, offsetting the gauzy guitar rumbles that are his central building blocks. *'Close your eyes and kiss the dice,'* he implores, *'You're on a roll tonight.'*

His own roll doesn't always rock as impactfully as it might on this album, but for an artist evidently more motivated by soul-searching than crowd-pleasing, maybe the journey is more important than the destination.

JOHNNY SHARP

CLASSIC ROCK

HIGH VOLTAGE ROCK'N'ROLL

www.classicrockmagazine.com

PSYCHIC LEMON

The Unheimlich Kingdom DRONE ROCK RECORDS

When life gives you psychic lemons, make shamanic instrumental noise-rock-ade.

Exactly the kind of band name to have this writer going arse-over-tit while running to check 'em out, this Cambridge duo do have substance behind the moniker. Now on their fourth album, they've found themselves elevated from congregating in a council estate garden shed to the dizzy heights of an industrial estate outside of town.

The music can be similarly concrete-slabby, starting with what sounds like a throat-sung drone for *Trepanning For Gold*, but is actually Andy Bilston's gigantic guitar roar, layered and looped with harmonics stretching for days, Martin Law keeping a tribal beat.

Cognitive Dissidents is disorientingly note-bendy with a little more funk about it; *National Psycho Geographic* is where white noise and arpeggio reverb swirl as Law keeps loose and busy on the kit. The 20-minute title track comes last, Bilston improv-ing, klanging and chattering over a synth burr and propellant hits, heading in a noisy Slift/GNOD direction. There's no melodic development over these pieces but the generating of a suppressive mood suits the unheimlich (meaning 'weird' in German) theme, so stay horizontal for a frontal lobe-flattening experience while listening. **JK**

SQUEAKY FEET

Cause For Alarm SQUEAKYFEET.BANDCAMP.COM

Colorado fusionists kick into gear with impressive debut.

Emerging from under the radar only recently, Squeaky Feet have been triggering sirens in all the right places with their overwhelmingly proficient hard fusion. The buzz about this band is not predicated on signs but rather on an awesome torrent: there have been a plethora of live recordings already and now comes *Cause For Alarm*, the much-anticipated debut for those in the know.

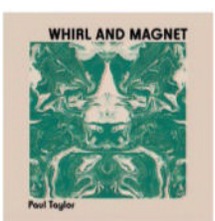
It's not shy and retiring either, and it quite possibly outstays its welcome clocking in at an awesome one hour and 20 minutes, but it's hard to forget it in a hurry after it leaves. There are elements of the Mothers Of Invention, Mr. Bungle or countless other tightly drilled, spasmodically virtuosic American boundary-pushers, while they take influences from King Crimson and 21st-century mavericks Snarky Puppy. As luck would have it, the latter's Mark Lettieri drops in for some dual guitar action with lead axeman Greg King on the staggeringly funky, 138bpm shaker *Tunnel Vision*.

Other highlights include *Chance To Grow* (one of the few songs here with vocals), full of glorious, stellar arpeggios that provide an insight into their unique universe. **JA**

PAUL TAYLOR

Whirl And Magnet DISCUS

Intriguing and intense sonic explorations on the pipe organ.



Having discovered an underused Hammond C3 organ in the bowels of Gateshead's Glasshouse International Centre for Music, jazz pianist Paul Taylor grappled with the complexities and nuances waiting to be coaxed from the instrument.

Unlike Keith Jarrett's beatific meditations following his 1976 discovery of a baroque pipe organ in a Bavarian church, Taylor's musical stream of consciousness has a decidedly physical dimension to it, giving the impression that he doesn't so much play the instrument as attempt to tame an obstinate but magnificent beast.

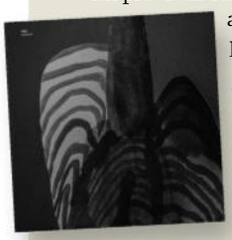
Replete with ground-shaking bass notes, startling harmonic shifts, and sundry clicks and clacks of preset keys, drawbars and foot pedals, there's a sense that the music is beautifully natural yet almost mechanical in essence.

Acknowledging his interest in 1970s progressive music where the C3 was the textural foundation and workhorse of many a band, Taylor delves into the possibilities of the organ through two suites edging toward the 20-minute mark, and while not directly quoting anything from that era, the musical architecture comes with a familiar echo. **SS**

JAZZ PROG

Sid Smith rounds up the best releases from prog's jazzier reaches.

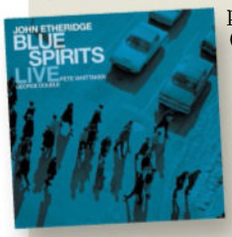
Recorded in Oslo, **This Celestial Engine**'s self-titled debut album (Discus) gives UK-born keyboardist Roy Powell, Gong bassist, Dave Sturt and ex-Swans drummer Ted Parsons room to explore echoing drifts of acoustic piano, reversed electronics, acid-etched organ and psych-jam blow-outs. So light on its feet as to almost feel weightless in places, it manages to be entrancing while still brandishing plenty of gutsy impact. Occasionally invoking the ruminative disposition of early 70s Soft Machine, the trio's bright, anthemic passages bring the album a warm accessibility.



With previous releases augmented by numerous guests and occasionally enlarged to orchestral proportions, the eighth album by **Fire!**, *Testament* (Rune Grammofon), finds the band reduced to the core trio of Mats Gustafsson on baritone sax, drummer Andreas Werliin, (imagine John Bonham transplanted to a free jazz session) and bassist Johan Berthling, whose simple motifs and pulses thread everything together. Whether delving into sonorous depths or incendiary heights, where his anguished wail of harmonic overtones haunts these tunes like a reproachful ghost, Gustafsson's bold musicality is as intense as it is expressive. Beautifully recorded by Steve Albini in a no-frills, no-overdub setting, this is as raw and as direct as it gets.

John Surman's *Words Unspoken* (ECM) documents the wonderful chemistry between US vibes player, Rob Waring, UK guitarist Rob Luft and Norwegian drummer Thomas Strønen as they coalesce around Surman's pungent baritone and soprano saxes and bass clarinet. While some pieces waft into existence as ephemeral as wood smoke, others engage with Surman's melodic writing. *Graviola*'s gently circuitous amble brings to mind the Canterbury scene's penchant for bright, warm tunes while *Flower In Aspic* underscores Surman's wistful tenderness as a composer.

Though he's best known for his work in Soft Machine, guitarist **John Etheridge** has always maintained numerous projects and partnerships. *Blue Spirits: Live* (Dyad) finds him alongside organist Pete Whittaker and drummer George Double, tackling a rich setlist including fine jazz standards and a smattering of contemporary material. Now a sprightly 76-year-old, Etheridge's fast free-wheeling on Sonny Rollins's *First Moves*, and his emotional phrasing during Mal Waldron's beautiful *Soul Eyes*, are red hot.



American guitarist **Mary Halvorson**'s *Cloudward* (Nonsuch) is yet another remarkable release in her journey as a bandleader. Her mettle as a soloist is well to the fore on *Desiderata*, wherein her fuzz-drenched angularities bounce off the walls. However, it's her generosity of spirit as a composer that impresses most as she provides spacious chamber compositions in which the brass and vibraphone-dominated ensemble rove and clamber across undulating landscapes via whorls of exotic harmonies.

WHOM GODS DESTROY

Insanium INSIDEOUTMUSIC

Hyperactive, hurricane-force debut from Sons Of Apollo refugees.

When Derek Sherinian recently posted on Facebook that 2020's *MMXX* was the "second and final" by his supergroup Sons Of Apollo, the "final" bit caused waves among fans already thrown by SOA drummer Mike Portnoy rejoining Dream Theater — also Sherinian's former group from 1995-99 — after 13 years away. But Sherinian had moved forward, with bandmate Bumblefoot. Early signs suggested their new group, Whom Gods Destroy, could potentially blow SOA out of the prog-metal water.

> **Akin to walking through a prog-metal hurricane.**

Whether or not WGD are a revenge tactic — yikes on trike — what an impressive bunch they are: the energy force in this debut is akin to walking through a prog-metal hurricane. Opening track *In The Name Of War* sets the tone, Sherinian's classical, Keith Emerson-esque figure soon joining an explosion of something bouncy but pissed-off-sounding, with some punchy Bumblefoot double-neck shred.

The rest of the band consist of a young, dynamic tier with ripped torsos and great hair: Japanese bassist-guitarist Yas Nomura, Brazilian drummer Bruno Valverde and Croatian vocalist and former Animal Drive vocalist Dino Jelusick, whose voice is a powerful mix of Chris Cornell and Alter Bridge's Myles Kennedy.

There are elements of Purple, Soundgarden, Alter Bridge and, naturally, Dream Theater on *Insanium*, but someone's spiked Sherinian and Bumblefoot's cornflakes as their own virtuosity is hotwired for the next gen. Take *Over Again*, a bombastic, djenty waltz coloured in by Jon Lord-like keyboard. Sherinian is a Meshuggah fan, so some verses have a polyrhythmic shift over a 4/4 bump, and *The Decision* moves towards the style of Gojira and or Brazilian thrashers Sepultura (Valverde's Latin patterns mix with a thrash influence), tempered by Mellotron and pretty harmonies. When Whom Gods Destroy do ballads, they are The Loudest Ballads In The World... Ever.

Crawl does anything but. It's a barrage of shreds with a flight of the Bumblefoot midway. Throughout the record, Bumblefoot's solos are jaw-dropping and sometimes preposterous, Allan Holdsworth-meets-Satriani-meets-Blackmore... and more. So what's left? The groove metal of *Crucifier*, the trancedjentering juggernaut that is the instrumental *Hypernova* (one for The Algorithm fans) and the downtuned synthwave metal title track, containing a lighter-waving moment and mid-tempo rumba rhythms.

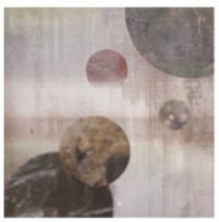
Bonus track *Requiem* is a *Phantom Of The Opera*/Ghost gothic tango, with a violin coda. Could a musical be on the cards? Anything could happen in *this* theatre of dreams.

JO KENDALL

THISTLE SIFTER

Circles THISTLESIFTER.BANDCAMP.COM

Second album from ex-pat Brit shows the healing power of post-rock.



Peter Barnes, aka Thistle Sifter, has had a rotten few years. As if the one-two punch of Brexit and the pandemic weren't enough, the British-born, Holland-based musician was involved in a serious bike accident that left him hospitalised and subsequently dealing with post-concussion syndrome.

His second album under that name is part of his attempt to process his personal trauma through music. *Circles* leans into the usual post-rock tropes, with moments of stillness giving way to sonic upheaval as washes of synth and guitar crest and then break, carrying with them the influence of everyone from Sigur Rós to Spiritualized. But Barnes's experiences lend *Coming Home* and *Old Man's Beard* a uniquely insular, shut-out-the-world feeling that presumably stems from everything he's been through in recent years, both personally and socially.

Circles feels like part of an ongoing journey back to normality, or an attempt make sense of a chaotic and unforgiving world, or maybe both. Even at its most intense, there are no sharp edges, just a soothing sense of tranquillity shot through with just the right amount of unease. **DEV**

JANE WEAVER

Love In Constant Spectacle FIRE

More dream weaving from the analogue-loving psych-pop purveyor.

European New Wave cinema enthusiast Jane Weaver has been reading between the lines on *Love In Constant Spectacle*. With inspiration coming specifically from subtitles, we're told, she's been experimenting by recontextualising and translating the words of directors such as Godard, Fellini and Varda, turning existential moods into songs.

Her 12th studio album comes with a loose concept, though the musical approach is along similar lines to 2021's *Flock*. The psych-folk element provides the chassis while the pop sensibilities continue to be finely honed and augmented throughout, particularly on opener *Perfect Storm* and the title track. There's a gorgeous interplay between ethereal electronic sounds and the delayed thud of acoustic percussion, *Emotional Components*, conjuring a wave of analogue warmth.

The Axis And The Seed is built on a haunting backbeat and bass motif that interacts delicately with space and delay, while the song *Motif* itself is stripped back to a plucked nylon guitar and Weaver's voice up close and intimate to the microphone, an effortlessly lovely moment that provides the perfect conclusion. **JA**

PER WIBERG

The Serpent's Here DESPOTZ

Ex-Opeth man's adventures in weirdo prog.

A multi-instrumentalist with an impressive resumé, Per Wiberg remains best known for his stint as Opeth's keyboard maestro, but his solo endeavours are becoming increasingly hard to ignore.

The Serpent's Here is more focused and powerful than the Swede's 2021 debut, *Head Without Eyes*. Full of huge riffs, strident space rock and oddball arrangements that draw from gothic rock, post-punk and even free-form noise, opener *Dead Sky Lullaby* and the title track are seriously weighty rock songs with big hooks that swim majestically up from the guitars' psychedelic churn.

In contrast, *Blackguards Stand Silent* is a dark prog sprawl, with menacing chord shifts, a mesmerising detour into blank-eyed krautrock and Wiberg's dryly detached vocals floating in the foreground. The crestfallen waltz of *This House Is Someone Else's Now* provides a gorgeously ramshackle moment of barroom blues, before the unfolding of *He Just Disappeared*'s slow-moving waves of hazy synths and the grungy pomp of *Follow The Unknown* complete the picture.

Going it alone has clearly brought the very best out of a sublime talent. **DL**

WORRIEDABOUTSATAN

Jæja WORRIEDABOUTSATAN.BANDCAMP.COM

Bradfordian soundscaper's krautrock-peppered 15th album.

Fifteen albums in nine years represents a mighty work ethic for Gavin Miller, the one-man synth shaper behind Worriedaboutsatan. He's evolved his craft independently since his 2015 debut, *Even Temper*, and his DIY spirit continues to shine through his compositions.

Jæja comprises two 15-minute songs, each immersed in gently throbbing synth lines, meditative four-on-the-floor drum grooves and sprinklings of new wave. They're haunted by a krautrock eeriness too, in the sense that you're listening with the turntable set at too slow of a speed. When a cyclical bass line starts to cut through the mix and sweeping synths begin to dance in a higher register halfway through the knowingly titled *Gavin Miller Is Hanging By A Thread*, introspection giving way for hope while remaining refreshingly atypical. *I Used To Photograph The Trees When I Was Younger*, is more guitar-centric, shimmering with a sense of nostalgia.

It sounds like a memory, and such a beautiful concept underscores the need for Miller's heady, elongated trances to be enjoyed more as experiences rather than as songs in any traditional sense. **POW**

YOBREPUS

A Rhizome Revolution Part 1 APOLLON

Oslo proggers unveil ambitious two-parter.

Dropped like the final season of a hotly anticipated Netflix drama, its two parts released a few months apart, Norwegian art-rockers Yobrepus offer what they describe as a "genre-bending rock opera". The conceptual storyline isn't that clear (although it involves that old failsafe, the dystopian vision of the future), but the music is compelling enough to encourage anyone to remain intrigued.

The promised stylistic switches are performed with consummate skill. *Stay Cool* channels the portentous style of an early 80s synth-rock band warning of imminent apocalypse, before *Holy Motors* reassures us, to a feel-good soft-rock soundtrack, that *'the answer to all our prayers is more technology'*. The nine-minute *The Enabler* has a hypnotic guitar figure hook up by a bass sax while a tale of creeping mind control unfolds across harmony-soothed anthemic touches. Contrasting textures characterise final track *Jupiter*, a love song laced with Floydian guitar flourishes.

All of which whets the appetite for part two, in which it is promised, "murderous AI drones roam the streets". If the tunes are this good, let them do their worst. **JS**

ZOMBI

Direct Inject RELAPSE

Synth-rock mavericks broaden their horizons.

Inspired by Goblin and John Carpenter, Zombi have been exploring the psychedelic and progressive possibilities of synthesisers for more than 20 years. Here, Steve Moore and Anthony Paterra have refined their blend of cosmic krautrock, cinematic electronics and progressive textures, stretching out in several previously unexplored directions. Insistent sequencer patterns and obsidian synth drones remain a vital part of the formula, but *Direct Inject* feels more rounded and less dependent on nostalgia than previous missions. Stately and grandiose, *So Mote It Be* wrings an ocean of melancholy and menace from a grinding bass line and desolate, descending chords; *Bodies In The Flotsam* creeps along at a glacial pace, darkly funky and enigmatic; *The Post-Atomic Horror* marries a grinding, King Crimson-esque bass line to a disorientating haze of strings and static. Most striking of all, *Sessuale II* is a languid, sax-embellished space rock odyssey; aimed squarely at the righteously stoned.

Each of these songs sounds like the past, present and future colliding with balletic elegance, and Zombi still sound like nothing else on Earth. **DL**

PROGRESSIVE METAL

Dom Lawson buckles up for a delve into the darker, heavier side.

Extreme progressive metal is clearly not for everyone, but **Vipassi** have at least removed one notable stumbling block for more sensitive listeners. Their long-awaited full-length debut *Lightless* (Season Of Mist) is an entirely instrumental affair, wherein rolling waves of elegant post-rock, jolting bursts of technical death metal and lush, cinematic atmospherics collide. Closing epic *Promethea* is particularly dazzling: an 11-minute prog-death odyssey with a dark ambient underbelly, it sums up this band's ability to sound like everything all at once, and nothing whatsoever.

Also instrumental, but much, much slower, **Clouds Taste Satanic** have followed up last year's splendid *Tales Of Demonic Possession* with another languorous master class in rambling, desert-dwelling doom. *79 A.E.* (Majestic Mountain) is the New Yorkers' most overtly proggy work to date, as pristine acts of Sabbath worship mutate into mesmerising, Floyd-esque dreamscapes and organ-drenched spook rock. Self-indulgence never sounded so damn cool.

Perennially underrated but always brilliant, **Manticora** have been skilfully tinkering away with the melodic prog metal template since the mid-90s and have amassed a near-flawless catalogue of albums. *Mycelium* (Mighty Music) is the Danes' 10th full-length and is easily identifiable as both their heaviest and most streamlined to date. Tailor-made for fans of Symphony X, Nevermore and Evergrey, songs like *Necropolitans*, *Golem Sapiens* and *Beast Of The Fall* draw from traditional prog metal, with adrenaline levels permanently maxed out and sublime, anthemic melodies pouring out of powerhouse frontman Lars F Larsen as if his head was a big, shiny tap.

In a similar, if slightly less adventurous vein, Norway's **Vicinity** have delivered their most accomplished set of theatrical bombast yet with *VIII* (Uprising!). Strongly influenced by prog metal's formative years in the 80s, but not without ruthlessly contemporary moments, songs such as *Promised Paradise* and *Distance* prioritise big, sugary hooks and regular doses of Dream Theater-like showboating. Great fun, in other words.

The startling success of bands like Wardruna and Heilung seems to confirm that there's a big audience out there for music with the deepest of roots. Berlin-based but of Lithuanian descent, **Romuvos** make grandiose and evocative folk metal that blends ancient instrumentation and pre-Christian chanting with austere, droning riffs and ritual drums. Fourth album *Spirits* (Hammerheart) upholds the band's metallic sensibilities, but delves deeper than ever into traditional folk music's eerie power. Fans of expertly twanged mouth harp will particularly enjoy *World Tree*, which shimmies between moonlit forest and beer-sodden moshpit with impressive nonchalance, leaving a huge, stirring refrain hanging in the air like a message from the distant past.

EMERSON, LAKE & POWELL

The Complete Collection SPIRIT OF UNICORN MUSIC

The *other* ELP's sole album remastered and bulked out.

Who else was on that original list when Greg Lake and Keith Emerson sat down in the mid-80s to draw up the names of a potential new drummer who might fit the template of a resurrected ELP while their former bandmate Carl Palmer was off conquering the world as part of the multi-platinum supergroup Asia? Simon Phillips? Neil Peart? Jeff Porcaro? Ian Paice? In the end the job went to big-hitting ex-Jeff Beck/Rainbow/Whitesnake man Cozy Powell — a happy alphabetic coincidence, granted, but ultimately a decision made on merit. "He was such a good technical drummer and such a good performer," Lake noted at the time. "Though it escaped no one's notice that Powell's surname helpfully began with a 'P'."

> **A better testament to their legacy than *Love Beach*.**

Whatever the reasoning behind the decision with regard to this retooled line-up, the union proved to be short-lived, producing just one album, 1986's *Emerson, Lake & Powell*. Still, as shown by this three-disc reissue comprising the original record bolstered by a pair of extra discs featuring live and unreleased material, it's stood the test of time well and is a much better testimony to ELP's legacy than the original incarnation's risible swan song, *Love Beach*. Especially good is the opener *The Score* and the strident *The Miracle*, while the handful of extras here — the loopy instrumental *The Loco-Motion* and the jazzy *Vacant Possession*, which clearly should have made the original album — are the work of a band finding their feet and having fun doing it.

Better still is *The Sprocket Sessions* disc, a set of rehearsal tapes that originally slipped out as a bootleg. Hearing this incarnation of the band thundering through versions of *Tarkus*, *Pictures At An Exhibition* and the exemplary *Pirates* is a joy. The third disc, a live one, sadly rubs salt in the wound, bringing as it does the nagging realisation that the trio managed only one North American tour before falling apart, as detailed in *Prog* Editor Jerry Ewing's very good liner notes. With Lake and Powell at each other's throats for most of the tour and their management fired halfway through, the band called it a day the minute they came off the road. The more things changed, it seemed, the more they stayed the same.

On the evidence of the live disc, the split is a very real shame; the band were playing at full tilt to an uproarious US crowd. Lake's voice is excellent — especially on a soulful *From The Beginning*— and Powell really makes his presence felt on the rumbling version of Holst's *Mars, The Bringer Of War* before levelling the first three rows with a medley of *Karn Evil 9 (1st Impression), America* and *Rondo*. File under 'S' for 'Sadly Short-Lived Supergroup'.

PHILLIP WILDING

ANDWELLAS DREAM/ANDWELLA

To Dream NUMERO

Belfast boy's teen psych-prog evolution bundled into a vinyl box set.

Centred around teenage Belfast guitar whizz Dave Lewis, Andwellas Dream started as The Method, a mod/freakbeat five-piece whose peers were Van The Man and the pre-Lizzy Skid Row. Slimming to a trio and relocating to Swinging London in '68, they flowered-up, changed their name, gigged hard and scored a deal with CBS subsidiary Reflection.

1969 debut *Love & Poetry*, produced by Shahan, emerged just as psych was morphing into prog, and for decades it's been a sought-after, under-the-radar gem (code for 'sold bugger-all at the time'). As one of three LPs in this luxe reissue set it's the standout, elevated by Musical Director John Hawkins' arrangements and the contribution of avant-garde saxophonist and flautist Bob Downes who brought Chinese flute, tingsha bells and 'dry leaves' to tracks such as the *Epitaph*-like *Lost A Number Found A King*. Lewis's songwriting goes from Marshall-stacked Cream blast-outs to hippie folk ballads with nods to Ten Years After, The Zombies' *She's Not There*, Small Faces' flangerama, The Move's mod toughness and some heavy Vertigo groove. Lewis's voice slides between Paul McCartney and Greg Lake and his guitar theatrics are always exciting.

With the alteration of the band's name to Andwella, so their identity fluxes. From 1970, *World's End* – written while residing in the titular Chelsea location – is a looser, more jammy proposition boosted by brass. There's Stones, Who funk, Santana and Fleetwood Mac in the whorl, but prog points go to the instrumental *Michael Fitzhenry*, where the Doors meet Tull, and the two-prong title track which explores a classical *Days Of Future Past* style in *Part 1* and a Crimson-y *Jesus Christ Superstar* rock opera in *2*.

With *People's People* (also 1970), Lewis admits to taking influence from Van Morrison, Dylan and The Band. Softer, sub-Hollies soul and MOR style replaces experimentation, but Lewis was still just 19 and what he achieved here is remarkable for that alone. **JK**

PETER BAUMANN

Phase By Phase ESOTERIC

The Tangerine Dreamer's space odyssey from 70s electronica to 80s pop.

Romance '76 was the first of the three solo albums Peter Baumann recorded for Virgin that comprise this box set, and his melodic synth-playing is immediately recognisable from Tangerine Dream. But Baumann's own music ran along leaner, cleaner lines. He was adept at arranging, playing with space and incorporating subtle detail – gently pulsing and ticking rhythms, jazzy electric piano chords, and distant synth clouds. By contrast, side two of the original album forms a suite of sorts. *Meadow Of Infinity Part 1* incorporates members of the Munich Philharmonic conducted by Baumann's father, Herbert, and the album concludes with the richly textured *Part 2*, with squelchy synthesiser bass and sweeter melodic top lines, and Mellotron adding a chilly grandeur.

By 1979, Baumann had left Tangerine Dream and on *Trans Harmonic Nights* the tracks are more song-like in construction, including his vocoder-effected vocals. The synth mosaics and chirpy tune of *Biking Up The Strand* are charming, if a tad cheesy, and overall it's a long way from the darker soundworld of *Sorceror*, his final studio album with Tangerine Dream. But it looks to the future and the synthetic hi-hats and sequencer rhythms feel like a precursor to early 90s intelligent techno.

The challenge for 70s artists was how to enter the changing landscape of the 80s without looking like a throwback or sounding redundant. In 1981, Baumann got a new haircut, struck a moody cover pose and went wholesale into electropop on *Repeat Repeat*. The title track is a maddening earworm with lines such as '*We have heard this song before/ Didn't we?/Didn't we?/Repeat, repeat*', placing it stylistically between Kraftwerk, Can's *I Want More*, *Da Da Da* by Trio and even Sparks, as Baumann's weirdly characterless voice sounds like Russell Mael's if it were run through Varispeed to make it deeper. It sets the tone for this eccentric album, with its glossy surfaces and incantatory pop hooks, and it's actually fun for anyone who likes this kind of stuff. **MB**

ENSLAVED

Heimdal: Deluxe Edition NUCLEAR BLAST

Black metal's most progressive band expand their horizons.

For a subgenre founded almost entirely on raw, visceral impact, black metal has evolved into some truly fascinating shapes. Dimmu Borgir added a symphonic sweep, Wolves In The Throne Room took a more ambient turn, and the likes of Myrkur and Zeal & Ardor continue to reinvent the form with atmospheric folk and African-American spirituals respectively.

Of all the artists emerging from the black metal scene, however, perhaps only Emperor frontman Ihsahn has embraced progressive musical thinking to the same extent as Enslaved. Over the course of 16 albums, the Norwegians have constantly driven their ship to new shores, while keeping sight of the feral aggression that first set them sailing down the whale road. Last year's *Heimdal* wove Norse mythology around a blackened metalcore and a plethora of inventive twists and turns. It's a magnificent album in its own right but of particular interest here are the additions that bulk out this deluxe edition.

First is a song deemed a bit too odd to take berth by its fellows on the original voyage. The band have described *Gangandi* as a hybrid of folk rock, early Mayhem and King Crimson and it's certainly an outlier. Add in jazzy keys and floating clean vocals and at times it sounds like two different songs overlaid. Elsewhere, cellist Jo Quail appears on new versions of *Congelia* and *Forest Dweller*, adding subtle strokes that embellish without seeking to overpower the already-layered originals.

Best of all, they also include the songs from their 2021 livestream *The Other Worldly Big Band Experience*. Enslaved released a string of streams through the pandemic but the most spectacular emerged as the world reopened. Teaming up with Bergen prog band Shaman Elephant, they radically reworked songs from throughout their career. The audio capture might miss the psychedelic visuals that accompanied the performance but its inclusion adds a whole other dimension to an already impressive release. **PT**

JETHRO TULL

The Château D'Hérouville Sessions WARNER

'Lost' album from the Château D'Isaster gets a vinyl release.

In 1973, Jethro Tull followed up their popular parody concept album *Thick As A Brick* with *A Passion Play*, another concept album – only this was one that the band took a little more seriously. It's arguably Tull's most progressive album, certainly their most inventive and lyrically acerbic, but it marked the end of the band's honeymoon period with the press. Its poor reception led Tull manager Terry Ellis to declare that the band had split up – much to Ian Anderson's annoyance.

The story behind its creation turned out to be even stranger. *A Passion Play* had been pulled together in just a few weeks after an abortive, borderline disastrous, recording session at the Château D'Hérouville, a residential studio outside of Paris recently used by Pink Floyd to make *Obscured By Clouds*. The band discovered that much of the equipment was faulty, while a cook from Hell seemed intent on poisoning them. Despite this, Tull produced more than an album's worth of material there, some of which would end up being reworked for *APP*. A few decades later the sessions were remixed by Steven Wilson and included on 2014's *Extended Performance* book set of the album, and now they're being released on vinyl for the very first time.

It's fascinating to hear the *APP* material in embryonic form, but what's clear from the off is the band's decision to pursue a direction that's both harder and more experimental, with electronics, looping and some fierce guitar in evidence. There are still melodic, acoustic-based songs – for instance, *Skating Away On The Thin Ice Of The New Day*, later to appear on *Warchild* – but the twisting, gnarly riffage of *Critique Oblique* sounds like the source code for prog's awkward squad. *Left Right* possesses a Sabbathian heaviness, while *No Rehearsal* is positively evil. And exclusive to this set is a version of *The Story Of The Hare Who Lost His Spectacles* without its orchestral backing. Any Tull fans who haven't heard the 'Château D'Isaster' tapes before are in for a treat. **JB**

GENTLE GIANT

The Missing Piece CHRYSALIS

Their new wave-nuzzling ninth album gets the Wilson varnish.

If 1977 saw a new generation blowing the fuddy-duddy doors off, the Shulman brothers and their peripatetically progressive squad were not willing to go gentle into any good night. *The Missing Piece*, recorded in the Netherlands, was a conscious attempt to trim structural fat in order to woo bigger markets; a response to shifts in the musical landscape. While it'd be an oversell to describe it as their punk album, it winks affably at the new era, also extending the hand of friendship to radio-teasing blue-eyed soul.

> **It's not their punk album, but it winks at the new era.**

At least its first half does. In a stab at being all things to all people, the old side two reverts to prog mode, or as aligned to the genre as Gentle Giant's inimitable stylings ever were. Complex thrusts and contrapuntal giddiness abound. The net result, half streamlined, half baroque, meant audiences were more confused than converted, and when the band doubled down the next year with the mainstream-orientated *Giant For A Day*, they realised they'd tumbled down an ill-advised beanstalk.

Taken on its own terms, *The Missing Piece*'s bravery is galvanic, and its oddness commendable. From power chords to white-boy funk, its idiosyncrasies give off a prickly heat. Somehow, its reliance on brains doesn't cut off the oxygen to its flesh and blood. For all the calculations, it still trips the light fantastic.

Steven Wilson's new remixes in Dolby Atmos, stereo and 5.1 surround sound make an already crisp, often staccato creation even more like jabs not jams, while an instrumental mix simply confirms the unit's tightness. As side one slams through the jaunty, very XTC *Two Weeks In Spain* and the power ballad *I'm Turning Around* (like Phil Collins singing REO Speedwagon), it's *Betcha Thought We Couldn't Do It*, which — as the title suggests in neon — addresses the punk elephant in the room head on. It sounds sweet nowadays, as if a bunch of school dads entered an Eddie & The Hot Rods impersonation contest and mostly, but not entirely, smashed it. *Mountain Time* is more Traffic than Traffic, and swings.

That's all dandy, but the second half is a reminder of how Gentle Giant being Gentle Giant is a unique prospect. *As Old As You're Young* chucks us straight into mock medieval mischief, while *Memories Of Old Days* decides seven minutes isn't too long after all and delivers a fine Derek Shulman vocal. *Winning* welcomes berserk drums, and frenetic finale *For Nobody* pretty much plays slivers of the whole album on shuffle. *The Missing Piece* wasn't for everybody, even if that had been the plan, but it hits the spot now.

CHRIS ROBERTS

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MANDALABAND

Mandalaband/The Eye Of Wendor: Prophecies CHRYSALIS

Eccentric 70s symphonic rock still charms.

In later decades, David Rohl became an author of controversial books about Egyptology. This is less random sounding when one hears the two albums he made with Mandalaband, an ambitious idea as much as a group, who constructed both hippie jams and conceptual prog epics.

Their 1975 debut wigged out likeably while obsessing over the word 'om', despite Rohl leaving his own band early in the sessions. Repurposing the name, his 1978 return consisted of music written for a Tolkien-inspired film that never happened, and featured a host of starry guests. All told, Mandalaband are quite a trip to get your head around, and bigger fun than many more balanced and sane entities.

Now reissued in two-LP editions (or a four-CD set with remixes by Rohl plus added rarities), the two albums offer unusual, askew energy. The first, played primarily by future Sad Cafe members, was a John Peel favourite and its stoner boogies and detours are a guilty-pleasure gas. In particular, *The Eye Of Wendor: Prophecies* leaves Planet Earth and finds its own bonkers orbit.

Commissioned to score the aforementioned aborted *The Lord Of The Rings* movie, Rohl reworked his efforts as his own fantasy saga – witches, warlocks... the works. Recording at Strawberry Studios, he called in all four of 10cc, as well as most of Barclay James Harvest, Justin Hayward, Maddy Prior, Noel Redding and the Halle Orchestra. The singers play characters from the story over symphonic rock that skids into naïve electronica and smooth ballads.

Delightfully dated now, but rich in earnest charm, it'll be warmly relished by fans of Rick Wakeman's comparable journeys or Jeff Wayne's *The War Of The Worlds*. One has to embrace titles like *Departure From Carthilias* and *Aenord's Lament*, and suspend cynicism for a climax of *Coronation Of Damien*, but the voices of, in particular, Kevin Godley and Graham Gouldman are so accomplished and committed that one is compelled to join Rohl on his loopy, possibly astral, travels. **CR**

NEKTAR

Recycled ESOTERIC

Cult 70s proggers' absorbing sixth album presented at its fullest.

Nektar were a confusing prospect for some during their early-70s heyday: a group of Brits living in Hamburg, hopping to and from genre – prog, AOR, and, here, a touch of yacht rock – with two non-touring lighting and lyrical conceptualists in their line-up of synthesiser wizard Larry Fast, then making waves after his first Synergy album.

Still, after the success they had enjoyed in the US with 1973's *Remember The Future*, they were highly regarded by Bellaphon, their parent company in Germany. By the time of the eco-conscious *Recycled* in 1975, the group had been releasing albums for four years and touring for six, and this experience shines through. Engineered by Geoff Emerick and made at the Château d'Hérouville, *Recycled* remains one of their greatest works. After recording at the château exposed the studio's limitations, the band finished up at AIR in London, with The English Chorale Choir with conductor Robert Howes adding vocal support to *Unendless Imagination?* and *Sao Paolo Sunrise*. The two suites of the original record were enlivened by the addition

Recycled is a fascinating listen, with Roye Albrighton's strong vocal and guitar work and Derek 'Mo' Moore's Chris Squire-esque bass playing. By the time it was released in the UK on Decca in 1977, the world had turned, and like a great deal of their work here, trickled out and went largely unnoticed. By then, too, Albrighton had left, and a new chapter had begun.

Offered in the customary Esoteric clamshell, this version of *Recycled* offers in-concert performances (at Calderone, Long Island, and Toronto's Massey Hall), which demonstrates the ability of the musicians to replicate their cosmic, pomp-heavy sound live. Geoff Emerick's discarded early mix of the album is included as well, shorn of some of the more ornate adornments. At times, *Recycled* sounds little like a missing 10cc album, and, to further the frame of reference for the Nektar-curious, *Magnificent Moses* is pure Be-Bop Deluxe. A treat. **DE**

VAN DER GRAAF GENERATOR

Still Life/Vital ESOTERIC

VdGG live and in the studio. Still vital after all these years.

After the shock of VdGG's unexpected reformation in 1975 and the release of their all-killer-no-filler comeback album *Godbluff*, the weight of expectation was extraordinarily high as fans eagerly awaited its follow-up, *Still Life*. Such was the creative surge that sparked their return to active duty, they already had the exultant swagger of *Pilgrims* and *La Rossa*'s demented waltz-time exertions held over from the *Godbluff* recording in the bag as they began work on new material in 1976.

> **Their inventiveness and originality remain outstanding.**

Adding the dark gravity of the title track along with what amounts to the triumphal procession of *My Room* and *Childlike Faith In Childhood's End*, it's little wonder the album not only continued to drive the band's momentum but became revered as one of the gems in a catalogue already brimming with more than a few masterpieces. That it did so is no real surprise given the strength of the writing and overall performances. Imbued with a magisterial solemnity that can just as quickly turn into a savage whirlwind of emotional catharsis, it's lost none of the cohesive force it so readily articulates.

Yet despite this success, 1976 also marked the departure of organist Hugh Banton and saxophonist David Jackson after the release of *World Record*, prompting Peter Hammill and drummer Guy Evans to overhaul the group's signature sound with the recruitment of original VdGG bassist Nic Potter and String Driven Thing violinist, Graham Smith. After 1977's studio effort, *The Quiet Zone/The Pleasure Zone*, the band's near-feral savagery was brilliantly documented the following year on the live double album, *Vital*. With a set that draws upon previous material, including a caustic *Still Life*, and earlier songs from the VdGG canon, the blistering versions of their recent pieces flicker with an incandescent energy.

The mood is belligerent and no-nonsense as the entire band, including cellist Charles Dickie and the haunting sax of a guesting Jackson, teeter along the tightrope between triumph and catastrophe. Topped by the boom of Hammill's stentorian rant and roar, their white-knuckle journey illuminates the dynamic chasms between Potter's subterranean bass and Graham Smith's waspish violin.

Drummer Guy Evans' production work on *Vital* doesn't get anything like as much praise as it deserves. The spiky, overdriven nature of the sound, let alone the tactile qualities of the music itself, means one doesn't so much listen to it as feel it deep in the bones. With both reissues receiving a touch of 21st-century audio TLC, their stark inventiveness and originality remain outstanding.

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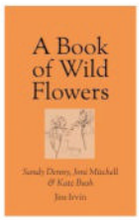
A BOOK OF WILD FLOWERS: SANDY DENNY, JONI MITCHELL & KATE BUSH

Jim Irvin SILVER HUTCHINS PUBLISHING

Repotted primer on Kate Bush, Sandy Denny and Joni Mitchell.



First appearing as an ebook in 2014, Jim Irvin's examination of Denny, Mitchell and Bush is now in paperback, serving as primers for each and comprising a well-researched biography – often featuring the author's own interviews – playlists and vinyl discographies.

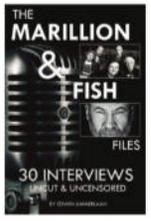
The 'wild flowers' in the title alludes to how the artists "blossomed in their own space, off to one side of the mainstream". An appealing concept, it reflects personality traits and creative approaches in affectionate, factually accurate and pacy renderings. Readers might well know of Sandy Denny – her preternatural skill as a songwriter and performer and her earthy demeanour – but it's still shocking to read of her struggle with alcohol, her personal life, and her tragic final days. Irvin's quotes from Sandy's father Neil are heartbreaking.

Irvin's own career buds in the Bush section; from hearing *Wuthering Heights* while an 18-year-old assistant at United Biscuits' radio network to forming the band Furniture, hoping Bush will produce his record. Updated with a 2016 interview from the *Before The Dawn* box set, Bush's responses remain typically sweet, shy and a little remote, an alpenrose on our prog slopes. **JK**

THE MARILLION & FISH FILES

Edwin Ammerlaan EA MEDIA

Marillion unscripted; past and present.



Dutch music journalist Edwin Ammerlaan began conducting interviews with Marillion back in 1987, which is why this book starts around the time of *Clutching At Straws* and ends with Ian Mosley, in 2022, revealing he can't start the day without a coffee and a shower and recalling playing a charity gig with Steve Hackett, Peter Gabriel and Mike Rutherford. Ammerlaan didn't start writing for Dutch music mag *OOR* until 1986, which helps to explain the chronology, even if it feels a little odd given that 95 per cent of the book deals with Fish and Marillion post-split, the tome actually begins with this little coda. That doesn't dent the fact that these uncut interviews remain an interesting read for the die-hard fan. The author, too, does himself a disservice saying he's "not the world's best reporter". Despite being all Q&A-style interviews, there's interesting stuff in here from the naturally amiable band. Best of all is a 2007 interview with Pete Trewavas and Steve Hogarth where they're played a selection of modern prog and Trewavas needs a gentle nudge to help spot his Transatlantic colleagues Neal Morse and Roine Stolt (in The Flower Kings), while Hogarth thinks the former "sounds like the Eagles". An enjoyable read, designed to be dipped in and out at your leisure. **JE**

YES: EVERY SONG, EVERY ALBUM

Stephen Lambe SONICBOND

In-depth look at prog big beasts' canon, now updated and even more in-depth.

The best entries in Sonicbond's ongoing *On Track...* series combine scholarly knowledge, a fan's passion and a lively writing style. Yes expert Stephen Lambe's look back over the career of one of prog's founding fathers – updated from its original 2018 edition, published in the series' early days before the format had been refined – checks all those boxes, acting as both a guide to their music and encouragement to go back and listen to it.

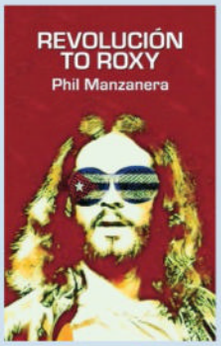
As Lambe acknowledges in his preface, Yes's race as a recording band was seemingly run when the book was first published. Subsequent reprints covered 2019's mini-album *From A Page* and 2021's patchy *The Quest*, but this edition brings things bang up to date with a track-by-track run through of last year's stronger (though still divisive) *Mirror To The Sky*. As elsewhere, Lambe offers an even-handed critique, judging the music for what it is, rather than getting huffy about who is or isn't in the band.

Other updates included an expanded look at the many Yes live releases and an overhauled, if unspectacular colour section featuring album sleeves and band photos. A useful guide to Yes's music, even for those who bought the book the first time around. **DEV**

PHIL MANZANERA

Revolución To Roxy EXPRESSION

A most enjoyable dive into the Roxy Music guitarist's storied past.



Phil Manzanera is one the true gentlemen of music. "I hope you'll find my family's history every bit as fascinating as anything in my 50-year career in music," the guitarist writes in this entertaining autobiography. "Of course, it's no problem if you want to skip straight to Roxy, but I think you'll be missing out on some cracking stories if you do."

> **His work with David Gilmour is covered in more detail than Roxy.**

This much is true. While future Roxy Music bandmate Bryan Ferry was dreaming of America in the north east of England, Manzenera had already seen the world. Born Phillip Targett-Adams in London to an English father who worked for the BOAC (the precursor to British Airways) and a Colombian mother (from whom he took his stage surname), he had lived in Hawaii, Argentina, Columbia, Venezuela and Cuba before he reached his teens. Today, that past would be a badge of honour for a group, but back then Manzanera would "apologetically say in press interviews that my trajectory was a million miles from theirs, but that wasn't what they wanted to hear".

Revolución To Roxy is full of the detail that's to be expected from a player as fastidious as Manzanera. Heath Row (as the airport was then called) is vividly recreated, as is his flight as a six-year-old on a BOAC Stratocruiser, and watching the Cuban revolution unfold through the eyes of a child. Yet if an in-depth expose of the ups and downs of Roxy's career is required, look elsewhere. Like the group's later works, Manzanera's writing is all about nuance and suggestion. Never a 'band of brothers', the broad smiles at the beginning of reunions always wear a little thin toward the end, yet undeniably, the love and the bonds are unbreakable. These ebbs and flows put Manzanera in good position to bear to witness to the splintered marriage of Roger Waters and David Gilmour — the former makes a cameo as a sporting aggressor until Manzanera thrashes him at table tennis, while Manzanera's work with Gilmour is arguably covered in more detail than Roxy.

What *Revolución To Roxy* lacks in scandal, it more than makes up for in the kind of unexpected colour that other musicians just can't match. The stories and detail come thick and fast: how Manzanera's father, Duncan Targett-Adams, may well have been working for M16 *and* an inspiration for near Havana-neighbour Graham Greene, using his job as a cover; how rappers Jay Z and Kanye West sampled a long-forgotten riff of his, making Manzanera more money than his entire time with Roxy, and so on. It couldn't have happened to a nicer fellow.

DARYL EASLEA

Take a bow

The exceptional Earthside.

Earthside guitarist Jamie Van Dyck.

CALIGULA'S HORSE

VENUE	UNDERGROUND ARTS, PHILADELPHIA, PA, USA
DATE	01/02/2024
SUPPORT	EARTHSIDE

Caligula's Horse are one of Australia's premier modern progressive metal acts so seeing them in concert is inherently awesome. That said, tonight's show is particularly special for two reasons: it finds them celebrating their superb new studio album — *Charcoal Grace* — and, perhaps more importantly, it's a part of their first-ever North American headlining tour. Luckily, the quartet make the most of the opportunity. Bolstered by charming banter, engaging visuals, and a stellar opening set from instrumental prog rock ensemble Earthside, Caligula's Horse's remarkable performance demonstrates why they've always deserved the spotlight.

Earthside quickly take the stage and dive into about 50 minutes of exceptional compositions. Their long-awaited second sequence (2023's *Let The Truth Speak*) receives much of the attention, with four out of the five tunes on offer coming from it. Highlights include the symphonically abrasive title track, the strikingly catchy and dynamic *We Who Lament*, and closing cosmic instrumental *The Closest I've Come* (the latter of which hails from 2015's *A Dream In Static*).

The band used outside singers on *Let The Truth Speak*, so they cleverly and effectively incorporate those same vocal tracks (from heavyweights such as Keturah, AJ Channer, and TesseracT's Daniel Tompkins) into their live playing. Early on, the crushing heaviness of the arrangements somewhat drowns out the vocals, but the issue is never too egregious, and it's totally fixed by about halfway into their set.

They also enhance the songs with fascinating imagery consisting of flashing multicoloured lights and what appear to be alternate versions of several corresponding music videos. It's a brilliant pairing, as the group's already spacey and evocative pieces are accompanied by abstract depictions of smoke, planets, stars, orbs, black goo and the like. The result is a multifaceted and highly cinematic sensory experience that — alongside keyboardist Frank Sacramone's energetic antics — makes Earthside's portion of the evening all absorbing.

Even so, **Caligula's Horse**'s expansive performance surely matches — if not outdoes — what Earthside accomplish.

Interestingly, they play only four songs from their latest LP, and rather than spread them out

Caligula's Horse: engaging visuals and awesome sounds.

"Caligula's Horse's remarkable performance demonstrates why they've always deserved the spotlight."

FRANK WHITE

across the 90-minute duration, they simply begin with two of them (*The World Breathes With Me* and *Golem*) and end with two others (*The Stormchaser* and *Mute*). As with Earthside, Caligula's Horse's vocals are too low at the start, but before long, frontman Jim Grey's distinctively powerful singing is blended perfectly into his bandmates' almost studio-accurate mix.

Just as they choose some of *Charcoal Grace*'s best material to bookend the show, they fill the time in-between with one classic older track after another (thereby providing an unexpectedly thorough career retrospective).

In fact, only their debut collection — 2011's *Moments From Ephemeral City* — is left out, so even 2013's *The Tide, The Thief & River's End* is represented (via the gorgeously hard-hitting *Dark Hair Down*). Subsequent gems include *Rise Radiant*'s melodically mesmerising *The Tempest* and *Oceanrise*, *Bloom*'s stunning one-two punch of *Bloom* and *Marigold*, and Caligula's Horse's lengthiest and most epic composition to date, encore *Graves* from *In Contact*. From start to finish, it's clear that the foursome's primary goal is commemorating their extraordinary catalogue with their new audiences.

Aside from a large *Charcoal Grace* poster and the lighting scheme, there's nothing notable about their visuals. Yet, they more than make up for it with Grey's consistently endearing interactions with the crowd.

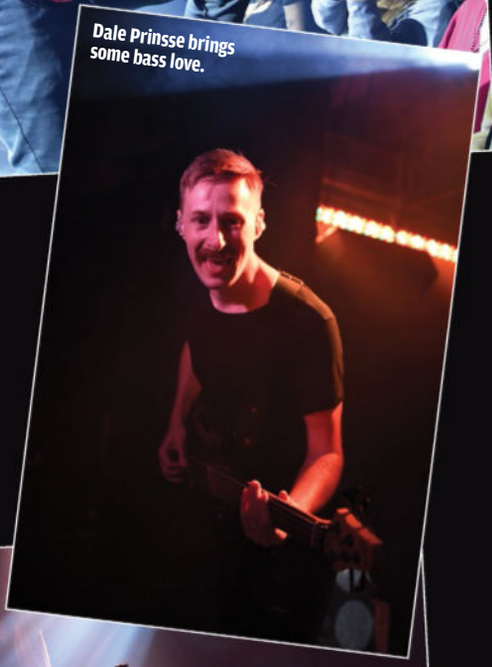
In addition to thanking the audience for their support as he speaks about the landmark tour, Grey playfully encourages fans to pronounce "prawn" with an Australian accent. He also jokes about being jet-lagged, urges people to jump around during especially heavy sections, and mentions how important it is to spread peace, love, and understanding as much as they can. That said, the best moment comes before *Oceanrise*, when Grey gets nearly everyone in attendance to chant "E-A-G-L-E-S! Eagles!" in recognition of Philadelphia's official NFL team.

It's difficult to imagine a better way for Caligula's Horse to kick off their inaugural North American headline tour. Despite some issues with the sound mix and arguably too little attention given to *Charcoal Grace*, the group continuously impress with nearly faultless renditions of fan favourites and Grey's effortless personability. Earthside's introductory set is captivating, too, solidifying an unforgettable live collaboration between two of today's greatest progressive metal acts.

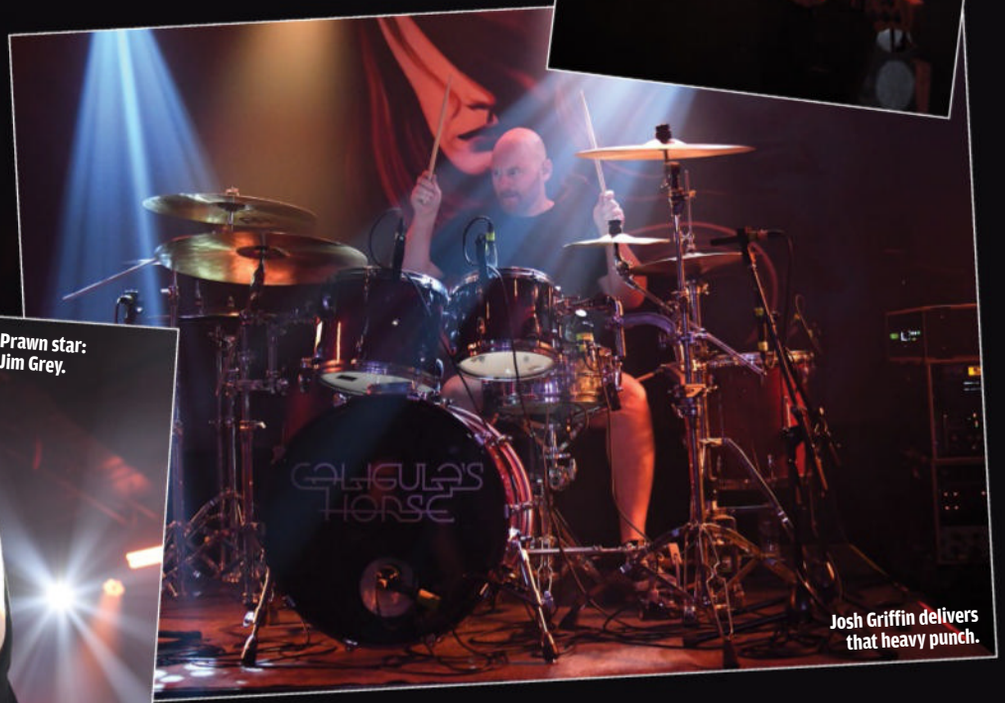
JORDAN BLUM

They might be jet-lagged but Caligula's Horse are on top form.

Sam Vallen: lost in the moment.


Dale Prinsse brings some bass love.

Prawn star: Jim Grey.



Josh Griffin delivers that heavy punch.

JON GOMM

VENUE	OLD WOOLLEN, LEEDS
DATE	27/01/2024
SUPPORT	JO QUAIL

The pairing of Jon Gomm's atypical acoustic guitar playing and Jo Quail's surreal cello looping is perfect. Here are two individuals pushing the boundaries of their instruments in unique ways, and tonight's audience are all too willing to listen, breathless.

The venue, a converted former mill, is deadly silent as **Jo Quail** stacks together layer upon layer of mournful cellos and percussive fingerboard witchcraft. Punters sheepishly whisper their order at the bar and a profound appreciation for her craft resonates. You can hear her hands thump against her instrument's gangly neck from the back of the room as she creates a heartbeat rhythm on *Gold*. Over it, she weaves brooding swells and distortion-warped melodies as it ebbs and flows like a dream. She ends with *Forge*, during which she casually tap dances across her duo of effects pedals. She conjures a slow-building storm that starts with droplet-esque plucks and ends with a thick, cacophonous and spellbinding monsoon.

By his own admission, **Jon Gomm**'s set "is a bit dark". There are songs about the death of his unborn child, homelessness and a stirring, Gommified rendition of the Ukrainian folk song, *Shchedryk*, dedicated to his friend whose apartment was shelled during the ongoing conflict. Yet, watching him slap drum beats out of his guitar's body, hands criss-crossing as he twists tuning pegs, you see someone profoundly in tune with their instrument and subject matter.

Retuning between songs, he stops to take a Ritalin: "I have ADHD," he quips, "if you can't tell by my guitar playing", and it typifies the personality behind these wildly inventive songs.

It isn't all doom and gloom, either. The goddess-inspired *Waterfall* is a beautiful and fluid opener, and *Cocoon* is rich with gentle spikes. Having befriended David Crosby over the years, he tells a story of how he asked the guitarist if he would be willing to let him cover one of his songs. "No," was his earnest response; a Joni Mitchell song would be more fitting. Sadly, he passed before Gomm's smooth interpretation of *Both Sides, Now* was finished, and so instead it makes for a touching tribute.

Gomm rounds off his set by inviting Jo Quail back onstage. At first her minimalist dreamscapes underscore *Passionflower*, during which Gomm manages to tread the line between shred and serendipity, but it's the closing number that deserves the plaudits. They roll into an enrapturing improvisation, the pair interacting non-verbally throughout as they fall deeper and deeper into their element. It provides an unrepeatable moment that accentuates the individuality and brilliance of both artists.

PHIL WELLER

IT BITES FD

VENUE	ISLINGTON ASSEMBLY HALL, LONDON
DATE	21/01/24
SUPPORT	JOHN YOUNG

John Young warms up the early birds by performing a handful of songs by his band Lifesigns, topped off by *The Last One Home*, a wonderful tune written with the late, great John Wetton during their pair's spell with Qango. Alone on the stage save for his keyboard and a mic, everything else is sampled. John is a fine singer and an engaging frontperson, but in these circumstances it's surreal to hear Dave Bainbridge peal out the impressive solo to *Impossible* when the guitarist himself is probably at home in Darlington, with feet up, watching *The Traitors* and eating a Pot Noodle (other savoury snacks are available). Prog karaoke, anyone?

The very engaging John Young.

Francis Dunnery recently admitted to *Prog* that past **It Bites FD** reunion tours were simply "an excuse to visit my family [in England]", but now the US resident returns home brandishing a new studio album, *Return To Natural*, recorded with a fresh line-up from the one responsible for last year's concert DVD, *Live From The Black Country*.

Calling all the heroes! Chad Wackerman.

With original alumni John Beck, Dick Nolan and Bob Dalton inevitably excluded, the towering Cumbrian is joined by former Fish keyboardist Tony Turrell, Paul Brown on bass, second guitarist Dave McCracken and, last but certainly not least, the iconic Chad Wackerman of Zappa and Holdsworth fame. Dunnery is clearly overjoyed by Wackerman's presence behind the kit, repeatedly name-checking him in apparent disbelief and relating how he had racked his brain over how to get in touch with the Californian… before remembering that he actually knew him. D'oh!

It's fair to say that expectations are sky-high as prog royalty Steven Wilson, Guthrie Govan, Greg Spawton from Big Big Train and Marillion's Ian Moseley mingle with an excitable Sunday night crowd. Forty-eight hours earlier, Dunnery's old boss, Robert Plant, had even dropped by to witness the Wolverhampton stop.

However, nothing in Francis Dunnery's world is predictable and the expected/hoped-for best-of/greatest hits set of It Bites comprises less than 90 minutes of music and a good quarter of an hour of Dunnery being Dunnery — lacing his anarchic humour with off-the-beaten-path song choices, and, crucially, some jaw-dropping playing.

The setlist is an absolute train wreck: *Calling All The Heroes, Old Man And The Angel, Kiss Like Judas* and *Still Too Young To Remember* are among the many staples overlooked. Of the two brand-new selections, only *Magdalena* resembles the classic It Bites sound in any way (its counterpart, *Out Of Order*, is an oldie written with Dunnery's late brother, Baz, of the band Necromandus). Dunnery's new charges perform the songs well enough, that's undeniable, though surely *Prog* can't have been alone in missing the fizz and charisma of the original band?

Let's be clear, though: when this line-up does cook — see: *Black December, The Ice Melts Into Water, Rose Marie, Murder Of The Planet Earth* and an extended, jammed-out take on *Vampires* —

Laughs-a-plenty from the It Bites FD frontman.

Tony Turrell: a mighty fine keysman.

KEVIN NIXON

He's still got the range!

Cooking: when the line-up works, it definitely works.

we're talking full Michelin Stars. To Dunnery's credit, he still performs the songs in their original keys, though we are informed that, at 61 years old, this is probably the last time that we will hear the show-stopping *The Ice Turns To Water* performed as intended.

Dunnery takes great delight in mocking himself for being bald and overweight and the crowd guffaws as he admits: "Down there in the front rows, you're all thinking: 'What the fuck happened to him?'"

Any smugness proves short-lived as Dunnery continues his diatribe: "Believe it or not, I'm thinking the same about you. Look at the state of you," he laughs, singling out one poor individual.

"When I get home and people ask how the tour went, I will tell them: 'To be honest with you, man, I thought I was on the set of Michael Jackson's *Thriller*'."

For most in attendance this was a night of sheer nostalgic triumph, though for some, it will be remembered for what *wasn't* played rather than what was.

DAVE LING

If he squints hard enough, Francis Dunnery can almost pretend it's the 80s.

> **"A night of nostalgic triumph, though for some, it will be remembered for what *wasn't* played rather than what was."**

STEVE HACKETT AND FRIENDS

VENUE	TRADING BOUNDARIES, FLETCHING
DATE	19/01/2024, 21/01/2024
SUPPORT	AMANDA LEHMANN

For the last decade Steve Hackett has played a two-day residency at Trading Boundaries. This year it's been extended by an extra day to include sister-in-law and bandmember **Amanda Lehmann**, who opens proceedings on the Friday night. Unfortunately, she's suffering from a chest infection that's affected her voice and brings about the early curtailment of her set. Despite this, she ploughs through 45 minutes like a trooper, commanding the stage. She plays a selection of acoustic tunes from *Innocence And Illusion*, which culminate in a visit from Mr Hackett himself on harmonica for *Only Happy When It Rains* and the singalong Mary Hopkin's *Those Were The Days*.

The main attraction of the weekend is, of course, the sublime **Steve Hackett**. These acoustic shows allow him to show a flip side to his musical ability: just him and an acoustic guitar, and on occasion ably assisted by brother John on flute, and regular bandmembers Rob Townsend on woodwind and Roger King on keys. There's a tangible intimacy surrounding these shows, but also a delightful ambience to proceedings: his appreciative audience remain silent during all pieces and greet each song finale with thunderous applause.

With tunes and musical interludes spread across his timeless repertoire, we're treated to a broad selection of material that includes a Genesis medley, individual solo pieces, classical elements and jazz improvisations.

Sunday's concerts are split into two individual sets, although there's no defined pattern, and the music pulls on the heartstrings and plays on the emotions as familiar pieces take on new life. *Gnossienne No. 1* sees the two Hackett brothers embark upon this classical *Sketches Of Satie* piece, which highlights not only their own individual musical characteristics and abilities, but also their close family bond. The first set closes with *Jazz On A Summer's Night*, a bonus track from *The Night Siren*, during which the band's solo performances are woven into the main theme played by Steve.

The second set introduces *Casa Del Fauno* from *Under A Mediterranean Sky* before the first visit of the night to 1983's *Bay Of Kings* album in the form of *Second Chance*. With the acoustic numbers being to the fore it's a delight that Steve also delves into *Guitar Noir* with the tantalising *Walking Away From Rainbows*, before leaving the stage to brother John and Rob Townsend to perform the spectacular woodwind duet from Poulenc's *Flute Sonata*.

The encore closes out with the jaunty *Bacchus*, during which Steve inserts a small theme from *Firth Of Fifth*. A wondrous evening indeed.

ADRIAN STONLEY

GODSTICKS

VENUE	THE PEER HAT, MANCHESTER
DATE	01/02/2024

In an unassuming corner just off Stevenson Square in Manchester's trendy Northern Quarter is an intimate venue that tonight has fiendishly difficult-sounding riffs dripping off its walls. It's Godsticks' second run of shows across the UK in support of their impressive LP, *This is What A Winner Looks Like*, and the band make the journey up north in rude health. They've opted for local supports on each of these dates, with jazz rockers The Kinky Wizards kicking things off in Bristol, while folk metallers Rifka and a bumper four-band bill will close out the tour in London and Swansea respectively. Such a move helps these bands reach a wider audience and tonight, guitarist/vocalist Darran Charles champions a "blistering" performance from Manchester progressive metallers Prognosis, before spearheading a set that offers the band's own finger-blurring take on the genre.

If I Don't Take It All, one of four new tracks included in their 14-song set, makes it clear why Charles enjoyed a three-year stint in The Pineapple Thief, as his supple guitar work and satin vocals strike the balance between grit and stirring, modern prog songwriting. *Throne*'s thump is iced with glistening lead guitars as the band dish out songs far larger than the venue's tiny corner stage. Charles calls *Mayhem* "a bastard to play" and acknowledges the suitability of its title before he and co-guitarist Gavin Bushell spin knotted shapes atop its pounding heartbeat. A return to the new album follows, with *Don't Say A Word To Me* rich with pockets of space and an emotionally wounded chorus, alongside some devious, out-of-nowhere fretboard runs. Notably, 2017 track *Unforgivable* has been given its live debut during this tour. Its opening two-note riff is delivered with a neck-snapping rhythm before low, monk-like chants take the fore. The song's technical, whammy bar-hammering solo, here executed with precision, is probably the reason the band haven't dared play it until now, and yet they pull it off without much additional muster. *Relief* and *Time* reference their *Inescapable* album, the former offering snaking syncopated riffs, the latter pinballing between a fast, razor-sharp guitar motif, and introspective instrumental turns. It's capped with the band's strongest chorus, and one that follows this writer out into the chilly, graffiti-littered streets later on.

After a faux encore – there isn't space for anything but – they churn out *Lack Of Scrutiny* with guts and guile. There's been a real dichotomy to Charles's evening; he looked a sight, shivering in his coat during soundcheck, but ends his night all sweat and smiles – the coat long gone – and it serves up a fitting metaphor. This isn't a band that should be left in the cold; they deserved a better turnout.

PHIL WELLER

EXPLORING BIRDSONG

VENUE	THE DOME, LONDON
DATE	16/02/2024
SUPPORT	BLANKET

Exploring Birdsong's career as a live band has been tentative so far, amounting to fewer than 20 gigs since they made their debut in Manchester in February 2018. Granted, real-life factors such as day jobs and a global pandemic have played a part, but the Liverpool trio aren't about to give Hawkwind any sleepless nights when it comes to the 2024 Road Dogs Of The Year award.

Yet the scarcity of shows has seemingly counted in their favour, lending them a low-level mystique that suits their music. It's not quite nudging Kate Bush on the scale of enigma, but it's enough for them to sell out their biggest headlining show to date, in the downstairs room of this recently refurbished north London boozer-cum-venue, one of depressingly few independent venues left in the capital.

Openers **Blanket** could do with some of that mystique. In possession of the most prosaic name in history – 'comfort' or 'wet', it's terrible whichever way you slice it – they've been serving up proficiently predictable post-rock for almost a decade without bringing anything new or unique to the party. Musically, their influences are all too evident – Mogwai, later-period Deftones, UK shoegaze, turn-of-the-90s US indie rock – delivered in waves of noise that never quite erupt in the way they should. That lack of identity extends to their presentation: four everyblokes squalling away in jeans and T-shirts like they've just rolled in from the rehearsal room. It's a shame, as it feels like there's a maverick streak just below the surface waiting to be mined, but right now, Blanket just aren't summoning magic.

Exploring Birdsong have magic to spare, and plenty of drama to go with it. Lit by a trio of simple spotlights that shift from blue to pink and back again, the minimalism of the visuals is in inverse proportion to the poised maximalism of their music. The fact that singer/keyboard player Lynsey Ward, bassist/fellow keyboard player Jonny Knight and powerhouse drummer Matt Harrison are all glued to their instruments out of necessity lends them an unexpected focus, especially on a stage as modestly sized as this.

Blanket: predictable and reliable.

Not that anyone here is concentrating on anything else, especially when the set opens with a brand-new song, the moody, balladic *Archipelago*. It's one of three songs making their debut tonight – the other two are soaring recent single *The Collapse* and another new song, the powerful *Turntail*, all of which augurs well for their upcoming debut album.

Unsurprisingly, the more familiar songs get a roaring reception from an audience otherwise held rapt by them.

> **"They might be a while away from arenas yet, but this feels like the start of something special unfolding."**

KEVIN NIXON

Jonny Knight has multitasking down.

Lynsey Ward brings the emotion.

While the studio versions of *Pyre*, *Ever The Optimist* and *The River* are grand and graceful, there's an unexpected but not unwelcome energy to them live. If Ward's crystalline voice brings the emotion, then Harrison's restless drumming lends them a power that's not always evident on record.

It's no coincidence that Ward moonlights as a backing singer for Sleep Token. The two bands' sounds may be worlds apart, but there is a shared sense of boundary-pushing. *Hope* and *Bear The Weight* take their various influences — Kate Bush and Tori Amos, post-rock, modern metal — and spin them into something new. That approach is illustrated by their cover of mid-period Deftones song *Diamond Eyes*, which brings it fully into their own world, tumbling piano and all (thankfully, they've avoided the temptation to strip it down and turn it into a John Lewis Christmas ad-style dirge).

They encore with *The Baptism* and *No Longer We Lie*, the latter featuring some joyous, house music-style keyboard stabs from Knight. It's an exultant end to an exultant set, and the rapturous applause that follows is a measure of the devotion they're already inspiring, something that's reflected in the smiles on the band's faces as they take their bows. They might be a while away from arenas yet, but this feels like the start of something special unfolding.

DAVE EVERLEY

Exploring Birdsong push more boundaries.

Ward belongs in the spotlight.

BEATRIX PLAYERS

VENUE	THE 1865, SOUTHAMPTON
DATE	04/02/2024
SUPPORT	COLIN MASSON

All too fleetingly, **Beatrix Players** glided into the prog realm with their enchanting classically inspired songbook, then disappeared almost as mysteriously as they arrived. After a five-year hiatus, they're back, extended, re-energised, and with a new album.

Supporting them, **Colin Masson** formerly of The Morrigan, is a one-man music machine. He evokes Mike Oldfield-like soundscapes on his guitar over pre-programmed backing tracks. The accompanying visuals offer insightful panoramas to illustrate his intricate, mostly instrumental compositions.

Tonight is the third live outing from the latest BP iteration. Sadly, cellist Jane Fenton is missing so string parts are delivered through guitar pedals and keys. Undaunted by a dead mic at the start, vocalist Amy Birks regroups after John Hackett starts *Snowflakes* with a sensitive flute introduction from the stage shadows. This, the opener to current album *Living & Alive*, morphs into second track *Somebody Else's Eyes*. Birks is in her element. Her expressive, finely modulated voice swoops high and low across the elaborate instrumental settings as they play the new album in chronological order.

Flanking her, guitarists Tom Manning, with whom she played at university, and Oliver Day offer tantalising guitar textures throughout. *This Is Your Life* is more upbeat. Drummer Andrew Booker, who surprises later with some vocal harmonies on *A Beautiful Lie*, drives it along at a solid pace with bassist Kyle Welch. *Overflow*, written by Birks' other university musical partner Helena Dove, allows keyboard player Matthew Lumb to shine with his cascading piano arpeggios, depicting the water subject matter of the song. Day adds more musical layers on slide guitar then mandolin.

Two songs originating from real-life happenings really catch the ear. The moving *Purgatory* comes from Birks' visit to a store where she witnessed a man verbally abusing a small child. The anger vents itself through Manning's strident, hard-hitting guitar solo. *You Can't Hit A Nail* emanates from two sources: familial social media squabbles and braggarts boasting about their home renovations without any regard to the lives they live within them. There's a subtle cello part in *Free* on which Hackett and Manning are totally in sync with their stunning instrumental runs.

They finish with songs from debut album *Magnified*, showing the almost seamless transformation from original material to new. Closer *What Do You Say* offers some of the evening's most powerful emotive moments. Birks and co skilfully pile on the tension to convey the frustration of a dying relationship. Even without a stately cello underpinning the sound, the music's loveliness still lingers in the mind long afterwards.

ALISON REIJMAN

MICHAEL ROTHER

VENUE	THE BARBICAN, LONDON
DATE	03/02/2024

Michael Rother's appearance with his Harmonia colleagues and Cluster members Hans-Joachim Roedelius and Dieter Moebius at the Southbank's Queen Elizabeth Hall in 2008 was met with the kind of hushed reverence that suggested a religious congregation. Granted, it was their first gig since 1976, but any enthusiasm on the part of the audience was disguised by an awe that tipped into an almost timid politeness. Fast forward to the Barbican 16 years later and Rother and his bandmates – drummer Hans Lampe, guitarist Franz Bargmann and keyboardist Vittoria Maccabruni – are met with whoops and unrestrained emotion worthy of a hero's welcome.

This outpouring is rewarded by a performance that will rank among Rother's very best on these shores. Combining his work with kosmische pioneers Neu! and Harmonia with deep dives into his solo output, this isn't merely a revisiting of his back catalogue, but a celebration and affirmation of work that's reverberated for over 50 years. The energy emanating from the stage is palpable from the off – 72-year-old drummer and Neu!/La Düsseldorf veteran Hans Lampe drives motorik beats and energy with a precision that could cut through diamonds, while the rhythmic fuzz from Bargmann's guitar crackles with all the energy of an electrical storm as Maccabruni adds layers of atmospherics. And there, like a ringmaster of repetition and linear forward movement, is Michael Rother, his guitar singing with its unmistakable and harmonised tones.

The opening one-two of Neu!'s *Neuschnee* and *Isi* set the pace. This is music of thrilling velocity that aims beyond the head and into more primal areas. Images of late Neu! drummer Klaus Dinger and their producer, Conny Plank, dominate the screen at the back of the stage.

Elsewhere, truffles are uncovered in the shape of the hypnotic *Weissensee* and a repurposed reading of Harmonia's *Veteranissimo* that bolsters the groove and pulses. *Katzenmusik 5* confirms Rother's innate relationship with melody with a five-note pattern that burrows its way into the psyche as Lampe targets the feet. Indeed, to witness the crowd slowly but surely getting up from their sedentary positions to move to the music is an utter joy to behold.

With *Hallogallo*, Rother and the band lock into a propulsive groove and resistance is futile as people leave their seats and rush towards the stage, where they remain for the stop-start monster that is *Negativland*. By the time *E-Musik* brings the evening to the close, any notions of reverence are exchanged for the ecstatic celebration that underscores this triumphant performance.

JULIAN MARSZALEK

TIM BOWNESS

VENUE	THE HOPE AND ANCHOR, LONDON
DATE	27/01/2024

A rich seam of melancholy runs through Tim Bowness's oeuvre like a town name through the length of off-season seaside rock, yet there's also a perceptible mood of barely suppressed rage in his performance. It's there in the way he holds his mic stand with both hands, his head bowed; he lifts it and looks out at the audience before bowing it again as if considering whether he should proceed or not. And it's there when it feels as if his eyes are following you everywhere regardless of who you are and where you stand in this compact and celebrated subterranean venue.

"Tim Bowness doesn't just sing his songs; he channels them, burrowing down into his characters and bringing them vividly to life."

Perfect accompaniment: The Butterfly Mind Band.

But, as we all know, anger is an energy and hanging on in quiet desperation is the English way, and this makes for a potent and gripping combination. The feeling is unmistakable in *The Warm-Up Man Forever*, a song that rolls patiently and methodically before giving way to six-string squalls that emphasise the resentment and bitterness at the heart of the matter. And this is what makes Bowness such a convincing performer — he doesn't just sing his songs; he channels them, burrowing down into his characters and bringing them vividly to life.

The musicians he's assembled — AKA The Butterfly Mind Band — go some considerable distance in hanging muscular flesh to the bone. The sedentary figure of The Fierce & The Dead's man-mountain of a guitarist, Matt Stevens, punctuates and accentuates to serve the songs, and to his left are IQ and Frost* veterans John Jowitt and Andy Edwards on bass and drums respectively. With a partnership as long as theirs, their playing is tighter than a miser at Christmas yet paradoxically more generous in their delivery. Rain's Rob Groucutt moves from keyboards to guitar while Theo Travis alternates between the flute and saxophone.

Despite the band's name doffing its cap to Bowness's last solo album, the majority of the set is skewed to the output of No-Man, his project with the ubiquitous Steven Wilson. Indeed, for some bizarre and unknown reason, *Butterfly Mind* is given a complete swerve as if it never existed. A curious state of affairs to be sure as there, in the middle, the material under his own name shines. *Rainmark* finds

Top brass: Theo Travis.

KEVIN NIXON

Tim Bowness: warm-up man no more.

Bowness's emoting bolstered by Stevens' ringing guitar, while his plangent voice carries the weight of both hope and sadness for an outstanding rendition of *Sing To Me*. The vulnerability on display is almost at breaking point yet matching the strength of a spider's web resisting an autumn wind.

On occasion, Bowness seems to disappear from the stage to become a spectral presence. It happens during an epic reading of *Things Change*, where his special guest and erstwhile No-Man colleague, Ben Coleman, feeds his violin through a phalanx of pedals to create gripping waves of sound that match Matt Stevens' work. Just by stepping to one side, Bowness is no longer the focal point as, bathed in green light and tucked away in the corner of the compact stage, Coleman's playing engages in some pretty heavy lifting. And so it continues as his skills bring depth and texture to *Watching Over Me*.

Yet there's menace here, too. *Mixtaped* incrementally and precisely rises from a slow burn to a flash before smouldering once again as the band lock in to edge ever closer to its fearful explosion. Bowness intones, '*You'd kill for that feeling*' over and over again. That yearning, that reaching back, that sense of rage are all palpable in a performance defined by drama and tension.

And then, to top it all, Tim Bowness does something that so few artists do these days – he brings the evening to a close with a preview of some new material in the form of *A Stand-Up For The Dying* and there's a strange comfort to be had with that familiar feeling of melancholy and barely suppressed rage. Long may he remain at boiling point.

JULIAN MARSZALEK

Guitar king, Matt Stevens.

PERIPHERY

VENUE	THE ROUNDHOUSE, LONDON
DATE	03/02/2024
SUPPORT	CROOKED ROYALS

With their fifth album *Djent Is Not A Genre*, US prog metallers Periphery pushed the dichotomy at the heart of their sound to even greater extremes. The meat-grinder Meshuggah riffs were as crushing as ever, but the choruses took on a more anthemic bent, edging the band more towards the arena-sized ambitions of Architects or Bring Me The Horizon than even their biggest djent contemporaries. Playing to a sold-out Roundhouse, they might just be onto something.

Granted, it's hardly Wembley, but the venue is already filled as openers **Crooked Royals** offer a perfunctory vision of 'progressive metalcore'. Their songs might be technical enough to earn the progressive tag, but ultimately are just ornate dressing on a style that is being copied ad nauseam with no sense of individuality or flair.

It falls to **Periphery** to show everyone how it's done, applying their own unique sensibilities to create something distinctive and enduring. The whirlwind of clanging, syncopated beats that signals set opener *Dracul Gras* clearly isn't the only note the band have cribbed from Meshuggah; a wall of wildly swivelling, flashing lights offering an impressive – if at times disorienting – technical display that, combined with the band's instrumental acrobatics, offers a glorious sensory overload.

If the biggest criticism of past Periphery shows has been their lack of flair and production, tonight they make up for it in spades. As well as the immense lighting, there are gusts of smoke and pyrotechnic blasts that underpin the sense that the band are going maximum effort for what vocalist Spencer Sotelo dubs "our biggest show to date". In turn, the atmosphere is electric, choruses roared with a gusto that shows the pop inclinations have paid off, while a figure surfed overhead in a sparkling silver jumpsuit suggests some of the old ways of prog remain even as this new generation push the boundaries of what 'progressive' means in the metal sphere.

Joyously careening between nimble, ascendant singalongs (*The Way The News Goes*, *Marigold*) and brutish extremity (*Blood Eagle*), the band refuse to allow themselves to be tethered to any one sonic niche. For all the impressive dexterity of their guitar work, Periphery never lose sight of how to deliver a massive hook, or inject a sense of drama into their playing. *Letter Experiment* sounds like someone playing slap bass on industrial cables, while *Scarlet* sees the band recruit the finger-picking talents of Mike Dawes for a rousing acoustic ballad, complete with spraying sparks. For a lesser band, such acts would feel needlessly flash, but here it feels like a statement: Periphery are aiming for the big leagues.

RICH HOBSON

AIRBAG/OAK

VENUE	COSMOPOLITE, OSLO, NORWAY
DATE	10/02/2024

It's quite something when fellow Oslo prog bands Airbag and Oak join forces for two 90-minute homecoming shows. Formerly a support band for Airbag, quartet **Oak** are now presented on an equal billing, and when they walk onstage the standing area in Cosmopolite is rammed.

This is the first time Oak have showcased their material from their recent album, *The Quiet Rebellion Of Compromise*, in their hometown, and it goes down well from the start, particularly the slow-building Ulver-esque *Sunday 8 AM*. Frontman Simen Valldal Johannessen, one of Norway's finest vocalists – and this from a country that has already offered up Andreas Prestmo of Wobbler and Einar Solberg of Leprous – sits at a grand piano and plays a few chords, complemented by masterful mallet drumming from Sigbjørn Reiakvam. The rest of the band gradually join in and an immense stage energy is created by Johannessen rising to his feet and pounding the piano keys, guitarist Stephan Hvinden fully bending his whammy bar while raising the instrument above his head, and bassist Øystein Sootholtet headbanging while somehow not missing a beat. It would be a fitting encore, but the last song is *Psalm 51* from *False Memory Archive*, which evokes *Damnation*-era Opeth. As it ends, the cheers are rapturous and it is clear that Oak have evolved far beyond a support slot.

Airbag take to the stage accompanied by Oak's Johannessen (keys) and Sootholtet (bass) as well as Caligonaut's Ole Michael Bjørndal. Like them, it's also Airbag's first time presenting their latest material in Oslo, and they open with a rousing rendition of *Machines And Men* from their 2020 album, *A Day At The Beach*.

An early set highlight is *Redemption* from *The Greatest Show On Earth*, where frontman Asle Tostrup stretches his arms out like a crucifix while singing '*God is your future*'. When he greets the crowd, a few people shout out requests for him to speak in English, as many have travelled from around Europe to see the show and witness Bjørn Riis's Gilmour-esque tone up-close. To his credit, prolific songwriter Riis isn't afraid to give Bjørndal the limelight on occasion, and he performs a flawless, emotive solo on *Broken* from 2016's *Disconnected*. When Riis plays, several audience members adopt a trance-like state of worship, waving their arms in the air, especially during the encore, the 17-minute *Homesick I-III*. Tostrup's melancholic voice, at times sounding similar to Mark Hollis, hits its stride and he dances around, clearly enjoying the music as much as the audience. Drummer Henrik Bergan Fossum's creativity and professionalism provide a powerful backbone as the band come together to jam a triumphant finale.

ANNE-MARIE FORKER

SPOCK'S BEARD

VENUE	229, LONDON
DATE	01/02/2024

A few songs into tonight's show, keyboardist Ryo Okumoto takes the microphone. Alongside his consummate musical skills, Okumoto is equally known for his showmanship and zaniness. Indeed, tonight he has already unleashed a couple of dazzling solos and been air drumming enthusiastically when otherwise unoccupied.

The audience await Okumoto's announcement, perhaps expecting a quip. But when he speaks, he does so somewhat wistfully, introducing his stage manager son Sage and recalling Spock's Beard's June 2001 show at London's celebrated and long since demolished Astoria venue. That night Spock's seemed on the cusp of a significant commercial breakthrough. But, of course, within months Neal Morse departed and what had previously resembled an inexorable upwards trajectory came to an abrupt halt.

That Spock's endure almost 23 years later is no mean feat. They still also carry sufficient cachet to draw several hundred fans to the 229 for the last of seven shows in the UK prior to co-headlining the MidWinter Prog festival in the Netherlands. This is despite the fact that it's been more than five years since the band's previous foray to this side of the Atlantic for a trek around Europe with The Flower Kings.

In 2018 Spock's Beard were touring in support of their 13th studio album, *Noise Floor*. It's somewhat curious that since that release, Pattern-Seeking Animals – who, alongside songwriter/guest keyboardist John Boegehold, also feature Spock's vocalist Ted Leonard, bassist Dave Meros and sometime drummer Jimmy Keegan – have released no fewer than four studio albums. Okumoto has managed to issue a solo album as well.

> **"Spock's Beard deliver a dynamic and enthusiastic performance."**

Without any new music to promote, tonight Spock's dip selectively into particular pockets of their back catalogue. While *Tides Of Time* (from 2015's slightly underwhelming *The Oblivion Particle*) isn't the most obvious or compelling way to kick off a show, it's clear from the outset that Leonard's powerful voice has comfortably withstood playing seven shows in as many days.

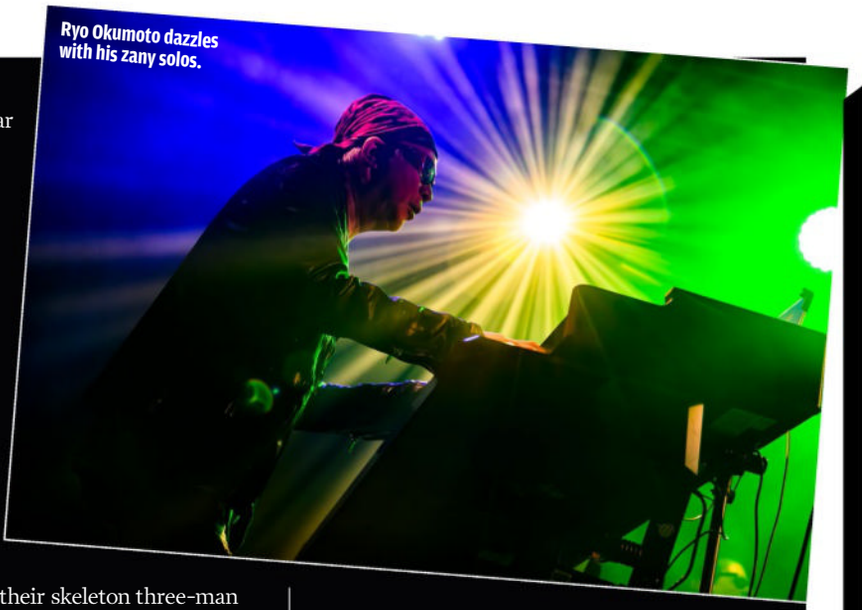
There are some real gems on the band's seven records released subsequent to Neal Morse's departure. Tonight Spock's focus significantly on their strongest Neal-less album, 2013's *Brief Nocturnes And Dreamless Sleep*, playing three songs from it. *Hiding Out* is a reminder that Spock's really can rock hard when they choose to; *Submerged* remains fabulously catchy; and mini-epic *Waiting For Me* harks back to Spock's early glory days. It's perhaps no coincidence that the last of these was co-written by Neal Morse with his guitarist brother Alan.

However, it's also undeniable that Spock's have never bettered some of their early material. Tonight the band offer up *The Good Don't Last* and *Harm's Way* (both from third album *The Kindness Of Strangers*) and close the main set with *Go The Way You Go*, before encoring with *The Light* from their seminal debut album, which announced their

Alan Morse and Ted Leonard trade licks.

All about the music: the no-frills Spock's Beard.

KEVIN NIXON



Ryo Okumoto dazzles with his zany solos.

arrival in spectacular fashion almost 30 years ago.

Tonight is really all about the music. Whereas once Spock's seemed to be setting a course for the stars and destined for larger venues, the harsh realities of 2024 necessitate a bare-bones approach. Rather than seeking to mask this, early in the show Leonard sings the praises of their skeleton three-man crew, including a tour manager whose tasks extend to front of house sound and driving the van. This is hardcore touring and not for the faint-hearted.

Notwithstanding the punishing schedule, Spock's deliver a dynamic and enthusiastic performance. At times, it's musically a little ragged around the edges and the stage show is distinctly no-frills. There's no backdrop and the house lighting leaves Alan Morse heroically soloing in the shadows on more than one occasion. But powered along by Saga's exuberant Mike Thorne — the third in a series of singing drummers for the band — and the ever-dependable Meros, this two-hour show represents a welcome return to London. Hopefully they won't leave it too long before another visit.

NICK SHILTON

Two guitars are better than one!

CLOSURE IN MOSCOW

VENUE	UNDERGROUND ART, PHILADELPHIA, PA, USA
DATE	10/02/2024
SUPPORT	KAYO DOT

Last October, progressive pop/rock quintet Closure In Moscow released their first studio album in nearly a decade. It's no shock that they prioritise it during their closing set at this year's Subterranean Dissonance Fest. With plenty of back catalogue favourites also thrown into the mix – and a compelling opening performance from avant-garde metallers Kayo Dot – the Australian ensemble mesmerise the crowd with spectacular musicianship.

Kayo Dot play for an hour and incorporate compositions from their latest LP (2021's *Moss Grew On The Swords And Plowshares Alike*) alongside older pieces. For better or worse, most of the material sounds quite similar (chaotic guitar work and percussion around vocalist/multi-instrumentalist Toby Driver's screams). That said, *Vanishing Act In Blinding Gray*'s spacey keyboards and clean singing, as well as *Library Subterranean*'s complex jams, are downright captivating.

Closure In Moscow kick things off with idiosyncratic *Soft Hell* opener *Jaegar Bomb*, a delightfully vibrant and intricate hodgepodge of hooks and instrumentation that demonstrates their mastery of combining boisterous songwriting with deeply sophisticated and fun arrangements. Other *Soft Hell* inclusions – such as the funky *Primal Sinister* and the hyperactive *Don Juan Triumphant* – do a good job of striking that balance, whereas *Lovelash* and *Better Way* emphasise their penchant for gentler and more heartfelt melodies.

The group devote a lot of attention to 2009's *First Temple* and 2014's *Pink Lemonade*, too, which seems to thrill fans even more than the newer tracks. The immensely catchy *Kissing Cousins* and *Sweet#hart* are clear highlights – with the audience singing alongside frontman Christopher de Cinque – and the one-two punch of *Neoprene Byzantine* and *Pink Lemonade* deliver exuberant quirkiness. Encore *Happy Days* is a celebratory way to end the night, maximising the party vibes.

Aside from flashing multicoloured lights and using the *Soft Hell* cover as a large backdrop, there's nothing to say about Closure In Moscow's visuals. However, de Cinque's unfiltered banter is more than enough to keep attendees excited between songs. From beginning to end, he holds the crowd in the palm of his hand.

Closure In Moscow absolutely nail their performance at Underground Arts, replicating new material and fan favourites with superb accuracy and pleasant humility. Kayo Dot impress, too, offering a fascinatingly hectic and dramatic counter to Closure In Moscow's relentless flamboyance. Together, they exude stylistic mastery while providing an excellent conclusion to Subterranean Dissonance Fest.

JORDAN BLUM

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MY PROG

PRESS/PAUL MOCKFORD

KEVIN FEAZEY (THE FIERCE & THE DEAD)

The great and good of progressive music give us a glimpse into their prog worlds. **As told to Grant Moon.**

Where's home?
The wilds of east London, via the Badlands of Northamptonshire.

What's your earliest prog memory?
Pulling out my dad's copy of *Tarkus* thinking – based on the cover art – it was going to be by some super-heavy thrash band, and being distraught at the lack of hi-gain chugging guitars. Never judge an album by its cover...

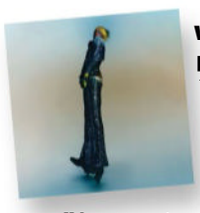
The first prog album you bought?
A second-hand copy of *Between Nothingness & Eternity* by Mahavishnu Orchestra. Our local guitar teacher lent me and Matt [Stevens, TFATD guitarist] his copy of *Apocalypse*, which of course blew our tiny minds. So I picked up any other albums I could find.

And the latest?
Unknown Mortal Orchestra's new album, *V.* Such an inventive band. An identifiable sound but always pushing different sounds, structures and textures.

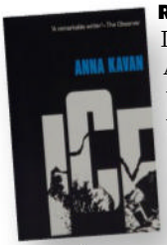
What was your first proggy gig?
Radiohead at Birmingham NEC, on the OK Computer Tour [1997]. I think people often forget how good they are live as the recordings are so detailed. It was incredibly inspiring and definitely altered our course as musicians.

And the most recent?
Last year was very slow for gigs as we were busy making our own record. In 2022, we were at 2Days Prog + 1 in Italy, Hawkwind headlined the night we played – the setting was perfect for some balmy space rock.

What's the best prog gig you ever saw?
Bobby Conn at the Garage London, early 2000s. If you haven't heard his [2001] album *The Golden Age* then have a listen. He should have been huge – so much love and attention to the music. Live he was a force of nature. Amazing.



What's your latest prog discovery?
Yves Tumor's new album, *Praise A Lord Who Chews But Which Does Not Consume; (Or Simply, Hot Between Worlds).* It's experimental, it's rock, it's pop, it's electronica, it's punk, it's prog – but it all makes sense!



Recommend us a good read.
I've just finished *Ice* by Anna Kavan. A real trip, very experimental without you ever realising. I'm still thinking about it, which is a good thing.

Any guilty musical pleasures?
No such thing! I've listened to Troye Sivan's track *One Of Your Girls* a lot, which sounds like a Daft Punk ballad. A pure minimalist pop arrangement.

Outside of music, what are you into?
I read a lot. I like history – always fascinating to discover that everything we think we know can change in the context of the time. And sci-fi – Stanisław Lem, Philip K Dick. I'm such a nerd.

Who's your prog hero?
Robert Fripp. I mean, c'mon! For a while he was the power behind many thrones. Approached music from angles, never head on. There's a few musicians – Robert Wyatt, Tim Smith and the like – who couldn't sound like anyone else if they tried. Fripp is instantly recognisable and that is something exceptional.

> I thought ELP's *Tarkus* was by some thrash band. Never judge an album by its cover...

Robert Fripp on one of his many thrones!

What's the most important piece of prog music?
Starless by King Crimson. Definitely.

The prog muso you would most like to work with?
Fripp again. I'd love to see his process and see our music through his lens. How cool would that be?

Which prog album always puts you in a good mood?
Kate Bush's *Hounds Of Love*. It covers most moods.

What's your favourite prog album cover?
The Dark Side Of The Moon. An obvious choice but there's a reason for that: iconic, simple, striking. Cover art and the music should be able to live comfortably side by side, and this really does.

And what are you up to at the moment?
We're rehearsing for the upcoming tour – really excited to finally get out around the country, it's been a long time. And we're getting on with album five, there's currently an abundance of ideas. Writing new material is always the most fun.

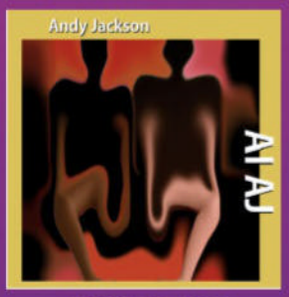
See fierceandthedead.com for the latest tour dates and more.

NEW RELEASES

JANE GETTER PREMONITION
'DIVISION WORLD'
(CD)

- The new studio album from the award-winning guitarist, vocalist and composer Jane Getter and her band.
- Featuring Adam Holzman (Steven Wilson Band, Miles Davis), featuring Alex Skolnick (Testament), Paul Frazier and Gene Lake.
- Release Date 23rd February 2024

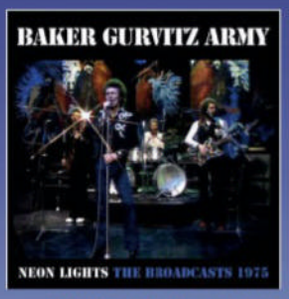
EANTCD1103



ANDY JACKSON
'AI AJA'
(CD & BLU-RAY EDITION)

- AI AJ' is an album which was inspired by the ongoing debate about the impact of artificial intelligence technology on our lives.
- As one has come to expect of Andy Jackson, this new album is once again an impressive and thoughtful musical work of sonic excellence. The release also features a Blu Ray disc featuring a stunning 96 kHz / 24-bit 5.1 Surround Sound mix. 'AI AJ' is destined to become one of the most original, impressive and talked about progressive albums of the year.
- Release Date 23rd February 2024

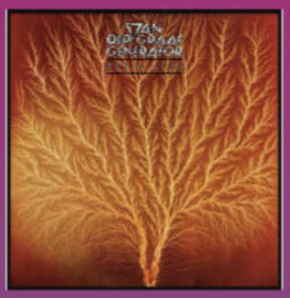
EANTCDB21104



BAKER GURVITZ ARMY
'NEON LIGHTS - THE BORADCASTS 1975'
(3CD/2DVD BOXSET)

- New remastered 3CD & 2 DVD clamshell boxed set of archive live recordings by Baker Gurvitz Army made for BBC radio & TV, independent radio & Radio Bremen in 1975. With fully restored artwork & new essay.
- Release Date 26th January 2024

ECLEC52854



VAN DER GRAAF GENERATOR
'STILL LIFE'
(REMASTERED VINYL EDITION)

- This new vinyl edition of this classic album has been remastered from the original tapes and was cut at Abbey Road Studios. It fully restores the original LP artwork.
- Release Date 29th March 2024

ECLECLP2866

ANTHONY PHILLIPS & HARRY WILLIAMSON
'GYPSY SUITE'
(REMASTERED & EXPANDED EDITION)

- New remastered and expanded release of the evocative recordings by Genesis founder member Anthony Phillips and Harry Williamson.
- Remastered from the original master tapes. With five bonus tracks. Fully restored artwork and new essay.
- Release Date 23rd February 2024

ECLEC2860

ANTHONY PHILLIPS
'SLOW DANCE'
(2 CD JEWEL CASE EDITION)

- 2CD edition of the classic instrumental album by Genesis founder member Anthony Phillips, 'Slow Dance'.
- This 2CD jewel case edition of the album features the remastered original stereo mix, along with a CD of previously unreleased 'Slow Dance' vignettes. It includes a lavishly illustrated booklet that fully restores the original album artwork and features a new essay by Jon Dann in the booklet.
- Release Date 26th January 20 24

ECLEC22590

VAN DR GRAAF
'VITAL
VAN DER GRAAF LIVE'

(REMASTERED 2LP GATEFOLD VINYL EDITION)

- New double gatefold LP edition of the classic live album by Van Der Graaf. Mastered from the original master tapes. Cut at Abbey Road Studios.
- First ever vinyl re-issue of the album with fully restored artwork and new essay with band interviews.
- Release Date 29th March 2024

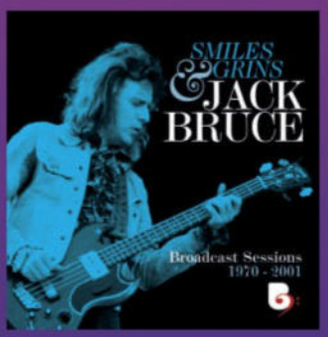
ECLECLP22865

(REMASTERED 2CD EDITION)

- Remastered 2CD edition of the classic live album by Van Der Graaf. Mastered from the original master tapes.
- With fully restored artwork and new essay with band interviews.
- Release Date 29th March 2024

ECLEC22864

JACK BRUCE
'SMILES AND GRINS BROADCAST SESSIONS 1970 - 2001'
(4CD/2BLU-RAY VIDEO REMASTERED BOX SET)



- A new official 4CD & 2 multi-region Blu Ray video boxed set anthology featuring the surviving radio & television broadcast sessions by the legendary Jack Bruce recorded between 1970 & 2001. Featuring an un-broadcast TV session of lifetime for Beat Club in 1970 & all the surviving BBC Radio & TV session recordings & appearances, including two concerts screened by the Old Grey Whistle test in 1975 & 1981.
- All newly remastered & restored from the original master tapes. Includes an illustrated book with essay.
- Release Date 26th January 2024

ECLEC62852

COLOSSEUM
'ELEGY-THE RECORDINGS 1968-1971'
(6CD BOXSET)

- 6CD boxed set celebrating the work of Colosseum recorded between 1968 and 1971. A remastered set including the albums 'Those About To Die Salute You', 'Valentyne Suite', 'The Grass Is Greener', 'Daughter Of Time' and 'Colosseum Live' plus an additional 12 bonus tracks drawn from studio sessions and live recordings. Includes an illustrated book with essay.
- Release Date 23rd February 2024

ECLEC62861

NEKTAR
'RECYCLED'
(5CD REMASTERED AND EXPANDED BOX SET)

- This new 5CD edition features a newly remastered version of the album along with two rare single edits, a discarded early mix of the album by Geoff Emerick and an additional three CDs of live recordings from concerts at Massey Hall, Toronto and Calderone Concert Hall in Long Island on the band's 1976 Recycled tour.
- The set also features an illustrated book and is a fine celebration of a progressive rock classic.
- Release Date 29th March 2024

ECLEC52867

PETER BAUMANN
'PHASE BY PHASE - THE VIRGIN YEARS'
(3CD BOX SET)

- New 3CD clamshell box set featuring all of the albums recorded for Virgin Records between 1976 and 1981 by former Tangerine Dream member Peter Baumann. Featuring the albums 'Romance' 76', 'Trans Harmonic Nights' and 'Repeat Repeat'.
- With an illustrated booklet featuring a new essay.
- Release Date 26th April 2024

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